

1997

# A Qualitative Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service Cotton Advisory Committees Using Focus Group Interviews.

John W. Barnett

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College*

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**A QUALITATIVE EVALUATION  
OF  
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF  
LOUISIANA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE  
COTTON ADVISORY COMMITTEES  
USING FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**in**

**The School of Vocational Education**

**by**

**John W. Barnett  
B.S., Louisiana Tech University, 1974  
M.S., Louisiana Tech University, 1977  
December 1997**



**UMI Number: 9820712**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

There are many people I would like to thank for their help in completing this research project and dissertation.

To Dr. Satish Verma, graduate committee chair, I offer my sincere appreciation for his guidance, and support for this project.

To Dr. Jack Bagent, Vice-Chancellor and Director of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES), I extend special thanks for supporting my efforts to obtain this doctoral degree.

To the members of my graduate committee, Dr. Mike Burnett, Dr. Vince Kuetemeyer, Dr. Earl Johnson and Dr. Daryl McKee, I express my sincere thanks for their encouragement and support.

To Dr. Gene Baker and Dr. Earl Johnson who served as moderators of the focus groups, I say thank you for going above and beyond the call of duty to assist me with this project.

To the individuals who participated in focus group interviews, I appreciate your time and the willingness to share your perceptions of Extension cotton advisory committees and programming.

To my wife, Gail and my family, Wayne, Kristie, Samantha, Matt, and Elena, I would like to extend a sincere thank you for your love, unwavering support, encouragement, and understanding during my pursuit of this difficult and demanding goal.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees as perceived by parish Extension agents and clientele. The study was conducted statewide, in Louisiana, with a selected sample of Extension agents and clientele representing the two major cotton-producing areas of the state. The data was obtained through six focus group interviews. Standard methodology for qualitative data was used in the analysis.

Four focus group interviews involved cotton advisory committee members, and two involved Extension agents. Nineteen Louisiana parishes were targeted in the study.

Study conclusions included the following: (a) advisory committees strongly influence decision making, (b) members are strongly involved in advisement, have some involvement in legitimation and communication, but no involvement in interpretation, (c) members have strong involvement in implementation, weak in planning, and none in evaluation, (d) members perceive serving on the advisory committee as positive, (e) the advisory committee process should continue to function, and (f) speed of information delivery and developing sound working relationships are the major problems and educational programs are needed in marketing, biotechnology, pesticide record keeping, and integrated pest management.

Based on the findings outlined above, the following recommendations were made by the researcher for improving cotton advisory committees and Extension programming:

- Establish one parish advisory committee to cover all crops.
- Focus on more effective representation and participation.

- Recruit and involve more young producers.
- Equip agents with a better understanding of the advisory committee process.
- Utilize the Internet to speed delivery of information.
- Create and staff area specialists positions in the cotton-producing areas of Louisiana.
- Utilize the program areas of 4-H and home economics to convey information.
- Future research to determine effective methods to involve clientele.
- Determine effective training methods to assist agents and clientele in understanding the advisory committee process.
- Study the roles that agents and clientele are playing in the advisory process.
- Conduct case studies of parishes that have successful advisory committees.
- A study to determine the perceptions of consultants, agribusiness, and research personnel related to cotton education programs.
- Study the effectiveness of Extension education programs.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **Introduction**

### Overview

The Cooperative Extension System of the United States is a nationwide publicly supported, informal education organization. Its origin dates back to 1914 and the passage of the Smith-Lever Act creating Cooperative Extension work at the state land grant colleges. The Morrill Act of 1862 had provided for the sale of public land to support a college in each state that would, among other things, teach branches of learning related to agriculture and the mechanical arts. The Hatch Act of 1889 provided for the establishment of agricultural experiment stations at land-grant institutions. The Second Morrill Act of 1890 gave land-grant status to several all-black colleges (Cole & Cole, 1983).

The Cooperative Extension Service has provided informal education programs to the American people ever since it was established. The philosophy was to help people help themselves; the purpose "to acquire and diffuse among the people of the United States useful information on subjects connected with agriculture in the most general and comprehensive sense of the word" (Sanders, 1966, p.26). When President Woodrow Wilson signed the Smith-Lever Act on May 8, 1914, he called it "one of the most significant and far-reaching measures for the education of adults ever adopted by the government" (Rasmussen, 1989, p.48). Knowles said of the cooperative extension program, "These rural adult educators of America provided a demonstration that adult education-when in step with technological progress-can make a difference in the life of a nation" (Knowles, 1977).

The Extension Service has traditionally served as a link between the university and clientele throughout the nation. Extension has disseminated and continues to disseminate information based on agricultural and home economics research conducted by the land grant university system. Extension's educational programs make the results of research in the land-grant universities, the state agricultural experiment stations, and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) available to all who need them. In turn, Extension reports problems facing its clientele to researchers and administrators. This cooperative, two-way communication provides direction for research and education, and enhances the application of research results. The programs of the Extension Service are available to anyone who wishes to participate, but no one is forced to take part (Miller & Smith, 1991).

In Louisiana, the Cooperative Extension Service serves its clientele in three major areas: Agriculture, Home Economics, and 4-H Youth Development. The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) is the educational arm of the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center and, as such, has as its mission the goal of helping people improve their lives through informal teaching.

The LCES consists of specialists, county agents, 4-H agents, area agents, and administrators. They are supported by special groups such as the communications department, computer division, and material and supplies department. There is an extension office in every parish, with three offices in Orleans Parish (Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, 1993).

The advisory committee is a traditional source of support and advice for the Cooperative Extension System at the parish level. The LCES uses commodity-based and

subject matter advisory committees to design parish programs. This researcher has used advisory committees to develop educational programs for over 20 years. During this time, new problems and issues have emerged and the need for strong support and sound advice has remained very important. Experience has proved to this researcher that educational programs must meet the needs of the clientele to be effective. Advisory committees are a key means of keeping abreast of these needs.

### Structure and Purpose of the Advisory Committee System

Historically, Extension has used advisory committees to identify, plan, and deliver viable educational programs. An Extension advisory committee is a group of individuals representing segments of the community who collectively advise Extension personnel regarding one or more education programs or aspects of a program. The primary purpose is providing advice (Cochran, Phelps, & Cochran, 1980).

The idea of seeking advice from clientele for Extension programming originated a long time back. In Iowa, county conferences were started in World War I to develop county programs with farmers having full participation in making plans (Bliss, 1959). They continued to be used extensively in Iowa in the 1920s to develop county programs of work based on what the people in the county felt they needed most, as well as on what could be effectively carried through. These conferences were later organized into the farm bureau organization (Bliss, 1959).

Extension has long looked to local leaders for their input into educational programs. The seeking of advice and input from local leaders is still a very vital part of Extension program planning. The literature reveals that Extension organizations across the country

use the concept of advisory committees in some organized manner. The use of advisory committees for program planning is an important aspect of the programming process of the LCES.

### The LCES Advisory Committee System

The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service is the educational arm of the LSU Agricultural Center and has the mission of helping people improve their lives through an educational process which uses research-based knowledge focused on issues and needs.

As an educational agency, the LCES is, necessarily, a change agent. It must be attuned to society and must continually adjust its programs, priorities, structure and administration to address the needs of constituents. In Louisiana, Extension programs are based on the needs of the people as identified by advisory committees. In the LCES, advisory committees are and have been an integral part of program planning, development and implementation for many years. The LCES has, over the years, successfully used commodity/subject matter-based advisory committees to design state and parish level programs. However, in the recent past questions have been raised by clientele, regarding whether the system is fulfilling its purpose in today's rapidly changing and expanding technological environment. The overriding question, as stated in a LCES technical report, is: Are advisory committees fulfilling the purpose of helping Extension agents develop sound programs based on the needs of people (Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, 1986)?

One criticism of the existing advisory committee system noted in a study by Baker (1992) is that often these committees have been centered narrowly around a commodity or

an emphasis area and have tended over time to reflect the views of only a few individuals. Are LCES advisory committees achieving their purpose of assisting Extension agents to deliver useful current information to their audiences? This remains a question of concern.

### Advisory Committees and The Louisiana Cotton Industry

For almost 20 years this researcher has developed and delivered Extension education programs to clientele involved in the cotton industry of Louisiana. In recent years, comments from this commodity group, directed to Extension administrators and this researcher, have conveyed growing concern about the ability of Extension to deliver useful information to the cotton producers of Louisiana. This group represents an important part of the Louisiana agricultural economy and has been the recipient of a significant portion of LCES resources.

In the fall of 1996 an electronic mail survey, directed to Extension agents in cotton-producing parishes, was conducted by this researcher. The results of the survey showed that cotton advisory committees are functioning in 19 of the 22 major cotton-producing parishes in the state. Three parishes indicated that they did not have a cotton advisory committee. These parishes account for less than one percent of the cotton acreage in Louisiana. Ninety-nine percent of the cotton acreage in the state is in the 19 parishes that have functioning advisory committees. Four parishes reported that the committees served as the advisory group for all row crops and not just cotton.

Advisory committees ranged in size from three to 43 members. The average size was 11 members. Seventeen parishes conducted annual meetings of their advisory committees and two parishes had meetings every other year.

The survey showed that all 19 parishes used the committees for program planning. Examples given of program planning included: (a) planning the boll weevil eradication education program in 1994-95, (b) planning on-farm demonstrations and field days, (c) recommending topics and speakers for production clinics, (d) assisting in defining cotton producer needs, and (e) identifying production problems and giving direction for education programs.

Fifteen parishes used the committee members to implement programs. Examples of program implementation included: (a) providing land, equipment, labor, etc. for on-farm demonstrations, (b) disseminating information from educational field tours, (c) assisting with the organization and conducting of educational meetings, (d) securing facilities for educational meetings, (e) securing speakers for educational meetings, and (f) assisting with securing financial support for parish programs.

Sixteen parishes reported that they used the committees for program evaluation. Examples included: (a) evaluating the success of field days and on-farm demonstrations, (b) assessing data obtained from on-farm demonstrations, (c) evaluating the value and impact of completed programs, and (d) annual critique of the parish extension cotton education program.

### The Cotton Industry in Louisiana

In 1996, Louisiana farmers, foresters, fishermen and ranchers produced more than \$4.2 billion in agricultural commodities that left the farm gate. By the time those products were processed, another \$4.4 billion was added to their value for a total contribution of



more than \$8.6 billion by Louisiana agricultural enterprises in 1996 to the Louisiana economy.

The production of cotton is a major part of this agricultural economy. Cotton is a crop of importance in 22 of the 64 parishes in Louisiana and has for many years been the major row crop produced in the state. In 1996, 4,014 producers harvested 890,618 acres of cotton. Production totaled 1.28 million bales, and the estimated value of the crop to the Louisiana agricultural economy was \$567,131,216 (Louisiana Summary Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1996).

The 1996 gross farm income for the top five commodities in Louisiana was:

Forestry	\$ 976,665,017
Cotton	515,573,386
Poultry	354,475,202
Feed Grain Crops	314,003,407
Rice	300,535,924

The value of cotton produced in the state ranks above all other crops with the exception of forestry (Louisiana Summary Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1996).

Louisiana's cotton production places the state as one of the leaders in this commodity in the nation. The LCES has strived to serve this industry with quality programs and personnel. Presently, the 22 parishes that produce cotton are served by 30 Extension field agents who are assigned some responsibility in cotton production. This responsibility ranges from a small percentage of time to almost 100% for agents in major cotton-producing parishes. Field agents are supported by a staff of state specialists with

assignments in the area of cotton production. These specialists have assignments that vary from a small percentage of time spent in cotton production programs to a full-time assignment for two specialists.

Louisiana's cotton industry is an increasingly sophisticated and productive segment of national and world agriculture, and one that continues to make major contributions to the state's economy. As can be seen from these statistics, cotton production accounts for a major part of the farm income and is a substantial part of Extension programming in Louisiana.

#### Statement Of The Problem

Extension has traditionally disseminated information based on agricultural and home economics research conducted by the land grant university system. Extension's educational programs make the results of research in the land grant universities, the state agricultural experiment stations, and USDA available to all who need them. In turn, Extension reports problems and needs facing its clientele to researchers and administrators. The means for identifying these problems and needs has traditionally been the advisory committee system.

The problem focused on in this study was whether cotton advisory committees in the LCES were effective in helping Extension agents develop sound programs based on the needs of people. This study identified if the need for change existed in the present cotton advisory committee process and structure and how to best go about making that change. The study attempted to answer the question of whether cotton advisory committees were fulfilling their purpose of identifying perceived needs and formulated recommendations for addressing these needs.

### Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees as perceived by parish Extension agents and clientele.

Specific objectives of the study were:

1. Determine extension agents' perceptions of the effectiveness of cotton advisory committees.
2. Determine cotton producers' perceptions of the effectiveness of advisory committees.
3. Identify themes and patterns in extension agents' and cotton producers' perceptions of the effectiveness of cotton advisory committees.
4. Determine educational needs and problem areas in Extension programming related to the cotton industry of Louisiana as perceived by cotton producers and extension agents.
5. Develop recommendations, based on the identified perceptions, needs, and problem areas for improving the cotton advisory committee system and future Extension programming.

### Significance Of The Study

The LCES devotes a sizable portion of its staff time to cotton education programs. Thirty field agents with support from the state specialist staff are involved in cotton education programs. Programming at the local level uses the advisory committee system.

There has been limited research to evaluate the effectiveness of LCES advisory committees, and none on cotton advisory committees.

There are benefits that the LCES could derive from the results of such a study. Findings of this study can help Extension agents make changes in the way they organize and conduct advisory committees to make them more effective in meeting the needs of the cotton industry. The identification of themes and patterns in perception of clientele involved in the cotton industry in Louisiana may also help direct extension agents to develop sound programs based on the needs of this audience. The findings of this study could give direction for administrators to prepare extension agents to deal with areas of concern. Findings could be used to determine if the present advisory committee system is addressing the needs of the cotton industry and could be used to formulate plans for change if needed. The information could also be useful to agents working with other subject matter areas and commodity advisory groups and provide direction in managing the advisory system.

### Definition of Terms

#### Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES):

The educational arm of the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center.

#### Cooperative Extension Service:

A generic term used to identify the cooperative educational programs of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Land Grant Universities and county/parish governments within the United States and its territories.

**Louisiana agriculture:**

A term used to represent the production, input services, processing, transportation, and marketing of the food and fiber industry in Louisiana.

**Parish cotton advisory committee:**

A group of lay people, representative of the clientele involved in Extension cotton education programs, working in cooperation with the parish Extension staff for the purpose of developing need-based programs.

**Louisiana cotton industry:**

A term used to represent the production, input services, processing, transportation and marketing of cotton in Louisiana.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the functioning of the LCES advisory committee system relating to the cotton industry of Louisiana. Relevant literature was reviewed, including the involvement of people in program development, the background, history, and use of advisory committees for planning programs, and advisory committee models. The present structure of the LCES and the use of advisory committees were also studied.

Research methods were considered to determine the most appropriate approach. The selected research method was studied to design the instrument and methodology.

#### **Purpose For Involving People in Program Development**

There are three basic premises that support the concept of citizen involvement as given by Boyle (1981). They are:

1. More accurate decisions are made about the relevant needs and opportunities for programs.
2. Speeds up the process of change.
3. Participants are better informed and prepared for active leadership in the process of change.

Involvement can be for many reasons: clientele acceptance, legitimation, communication, problem solving, evaluation or educational experience. The reason for

involvement must be known before the process can be implemented. Boyle (1981) lists nine reasons for involving people in program development:

1. The educability of the citizen, and the belief in reason, with the end product being understanding, consensus, and wise decisions.
2. Securing the consent of the public.
3. Citizen involvement provides the programmer with better information about the wishes and needs of the clientele.
4. Participation, a vehicle for social therapy.
5. A means to alter the power structure.
6. A way to legitimize programs.
7. To facilitate the teaching-learning process.
8. A way to mobilize resources.
9. Participation is by nature an affirmative activity seeking to exercise the initiative, creativity, and self-reliance of the individual.

Involving citizens in Extension efforts requires that we know our purpose for involving them before selecting the level at which they will be involved. Boyle (1981) lists three factors that will affect clientele involvement: nature of the planning task, functional roles, and planning ideologies.

A major purpose for involving people is to gain their acceptance for programs. There are two ideas that are important to gain acceptance of programs. People's perceptions of the situational background of the problem must be analyzed, delineated, and communicated; and the accepted and respected leadership of the community, the

neighborhood, the association, or the group being worked with must be involved. Leadership in these systems must be developed and a close relationship must be maintained. The idea of involving community leaders is not new. Most community specialists have discovered that leaders are more apt to accept change when they are involved (Boyle, 1981).

It has been widely acclaimed by practitioners, researchers, and state and national leaders that the development and improvement of quality education programs depends on maintaining a close working relationship among education, industry, business, and labor. This philosophy, which permeates all public education, has been a guiding concept since the early development of vocational education and has provided the basic framework for all current career-related programs (Cochran, Phelps & Cochran, 1980). The grassroots approach involving leading citizens in the identification of critical county issues makes citizens aware of local conditions and potential solutions. It also provides the foundation through which national initiatives and county issues can come together (Richardson & Ladewig, 1989).

There are many informal and formal approaches to involve people. Boyle (1981) identifies ten forms of people involvement:

1. Task Force
2. Ombudsman
3. Advocacy Planning
4. Formal Hearing
5. Unobtrusive Measures
6. Brainstorming



7. Content Analysis
8. Nominal Groups
9. Surveys
10. Advisory Committees

Many of these methods are used in Extension and other vocational education programs. The advisory committee method has had widespread use by vocational education programs, including Extension.

#### History and Use of Advisory Committees

An advisory committee is a group composed primarily of individuals outside the education profession who are selected from segments of the community to collectively advise education personnel regarding one or more education programs or aspects of a program. The primary purpose of an advisory committee is just that-one of providing advice (Cochran, Phelps & Cochran, 1980).

Historically, citizen committees served as the fore-runners of several segments of the present education system. In the early apprenticeship programs developed by the guilds during the Middle Ages advice was sought for the development of a system of vocational education for the working people. Similarly, colonial officials in New England insisted that everyone should be able to read and write. When experience proved that parents were not equally diligent or able to teach their children, officials were quick to decree that the chosen men in every town be charged with the responsibility for the redress of this evil. As communities grew and government became more complex, local leaders began to rely

heavily on appointed committees of fellow citizens to review proposals, make recommendations, and report back to them (Cochran, Phelps & Cochran, 1980).

An organization cannot look back at what has been, but must look forward with a vision for the future based on the needs of society. This has long been known and practiced by vocational education professionals. The earliest proponents of vocational education recognized the need to establish a close working relationship with counterparts in business, industry, and agriculture. School-initiated advisory committees have been present in public education for most of this century. Committees in agricultural education, for example, have been traced to 1911 (Cochran, Phelps & Cochran, 1980).

Every society has used adult education processes to continue the development of the kind of citizens visualized to be required for the maintenance and progress of that society (Knowles, 1970). Advisory committees and councils are used as a part of the adult education process and are not unique to Extension or American educational systems. Most viable human resource development programs almost always have planning committees (or councils or task forces) for every level of activity: one for organization-wide programs, one for each departmental or other functional group program, and one for each learning experience (Knowles, 1984). In the British government it has long been assumed that advisory councils and committees are a necessary part of the policy-forming and testing system. These committees and councils have been used extensively for many years to provide independent advice to decision makers (Kogan & Packwood, 1974).

For some years now throughout Canada, in varying degrees in each province, there has been an emphasis on the need for increased public involvement in the governance and

management of public education. Quebec, which has done more than any other province to democratize education, requires by law the formation of school committees and regional parent committees as advisory bodies to the school principal and school board respectively (Canadian Education Association, 1981).

Most professionals are accustomed to working in circumstances in which major policies are established by citizen authority. Usually, however, the impact of this control is relatively general (Houle, 1980). Advisory committees must have guidelines that will allow members to be involved in planning, influencing program direction, and implementation. Merely having mechanisms for mutual planning will not suffice. They must be treated in good faith, with real delegation of responsibility and real influence in decision making, or they will backfire (Knowles, 1984).

Citizens' advisory councils and committees are active in the formulation of Extension programs at the local, state, and federal levels. Through this process of participation, people come to know the organization. Support for an organization depends upon the extent to which the organization is based on principles that are widely accepted by local citizens. Extension has a strong local identity. The content of Extension's education programs is largely determined through the involvement of people in the program planning process. Advisory groups also have a direct say in matters concerning personnel, budgets, and programs (Warner & Christenson, 1984).

### An Advisory Committee Model

The failure to recognize and use change leads to three common errors: (a) believing yesterday's solutions will solve today's problems, (b) assuming present trends will continue,

and (c) neglecting the opportunities of future change (Martel, 1986). An educational agency such as the Cooperative Extension Service exists to facilitate change. Changing needs of society necessitate constant changes in the organization of educational agencies if those agencies are to make adjustments in their programs necessary to fulfill the purpose for which they were created. The involvement of people in advisory groups, advertently or inadvertently, represents a movement in the direction of change. To creatively plan for educational change, therefore, is a central purpose in the use of advisory groups in Extension work (Cole & Cole, 1983).

To plan and implement change effectively, an organization must have a structured process. Cole and Cole (1983) identified a model for organizing advisory councils. This model is divided into three essential components of an advisory council: (1) Structural Components, (2) Programming Components, and (3) Group Behavior Components. It is implied that absence or weakness of any of the three components will render a council less effective.

Structural components comprise the general framework for the legal and technical functions of councils. The structural components include: the general context of the council within the total system, the purpose, levels, power and limitations, membership, bylaws, and guidelines for officers and conducting meetings. The agent's role in the council is also defined in this component.

Programming components refer to the actual work of councils in programming, to do effectively what they are organized to do. Assessing needs, establishing goals and

objectives, selecting and organizing learning tasks, and evaluating the program are the major building blocks of the programming components of an advisory council.

Group behavior components refer to how people feel about being in a group, how they react and relate to each other, and if they are able to blend. The specific group behavior components are: (a) task and maintenance functions, (b) dimensions of group growth, (c) communication, (d) dealing with conflict, and (e) decision making in groups.

The model presented by Cole (1983) is a means of organizing the components at work in a council. Specific content for the areas should be developed by each agent and group according to their particular needs. The main purpose of the model is to provide a framework for addressing advisory council needs in a systemic, organized way so that efforts are not piecemeal and unrelated.

The model given by Cole and Cole (1983) contains the elements recommended by the Cooperative Extension System to get people to help Extension staff develop relevant programs. The model has a generic organization pattern and process, that has been adapted by many state extension services to meet their unique circumstances. This model or one with similar patterns and processes combined with the right people can lead to successful Extension programs. Getting the "right" people to serve is the key to an effective advisory system. "Right" people are those who have interest in planning for community improvement, are knowledgeable and willing to invest time, and have the ability to plan and work with others (Rohs, 1993).

An electronic mail survey of 19 cotton producing parishes with functioning advisory committees conducted by this researcher in 1996 asked agents to give examples of how their

cotton advisory committees were involved in program planning, implementation, and evaluation. The results showed that many of the components of this model were at work. All committees met on a regular schedule. All 19 parishes used their committees for program planning. In many cases the committee identified needs, planned programs, and assisted with selecting topics and speakers. Fifteen parishes used committee members to implement programs. Members were involved in educational tours, conducting meetings, and disseminating information. Sixteen parishes used the committees for follow-up evaluation of programs.

#### Advisory Committees and LCES Programming

The LCES is a diverse statewide organization composed of many individuals, offices, programs, and work assignments. Some LCES parish offices have as few as two professional staff members, while others have much larger staffs. Some parish staff members work across parish lines, others have assignments in more than one program area. New educational programs such as solid waste management, recycling, energy, and sustainable agriculture have been started in recent years. However, the basic structure of the LCES is working with farmers, homemakers, and 4-H youth. Based on the personal observation of this researcher, the advisory committee system is a key component in establishing program direction, and assisting with implementation and evaluation.

Cole and Cole (1983) state that the fundamental purpose of educational agencies is to serve the people through a planned program. The literature supports the concept of people involvement as being a most effective method of planning programs that will address the needs of the targeted audience. Involving people in program development is a

fundamental philosophical tenet of the LCES. This ensures that extension programs are based on local and state needs and issues. The operating policy of the LCES states that a system of representative advisory groups at parish, area and state levels shall be established which will enable Extension faculty to involve people in all phases of program development - planning, implementation and evaluation - for developing a viable and credible extension program (Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, 1991). Figure 1 shows that the LCES advisory committee structure involves clientele and Extension faculty in the programming process, at parish, area and state levels.

The membership and functions of extension advisory groups related to base programs, and the responsibility of extension faculty in this regard, as outlined in a 1991 LCES policy letter, are as follows:

**A. Membership**

1. All ethnic groups
2. All geographic areas
3. All enterprise and subject areas
4. All farm organizations
5. State and U.S. legislators
6. Special interest groups
7. Police jury
8. School board
9. USDA agencies
10. Agribusiness, other business and civic groups

11. Others, in keeping with normal committee representation including the press, radio, TV, etc.

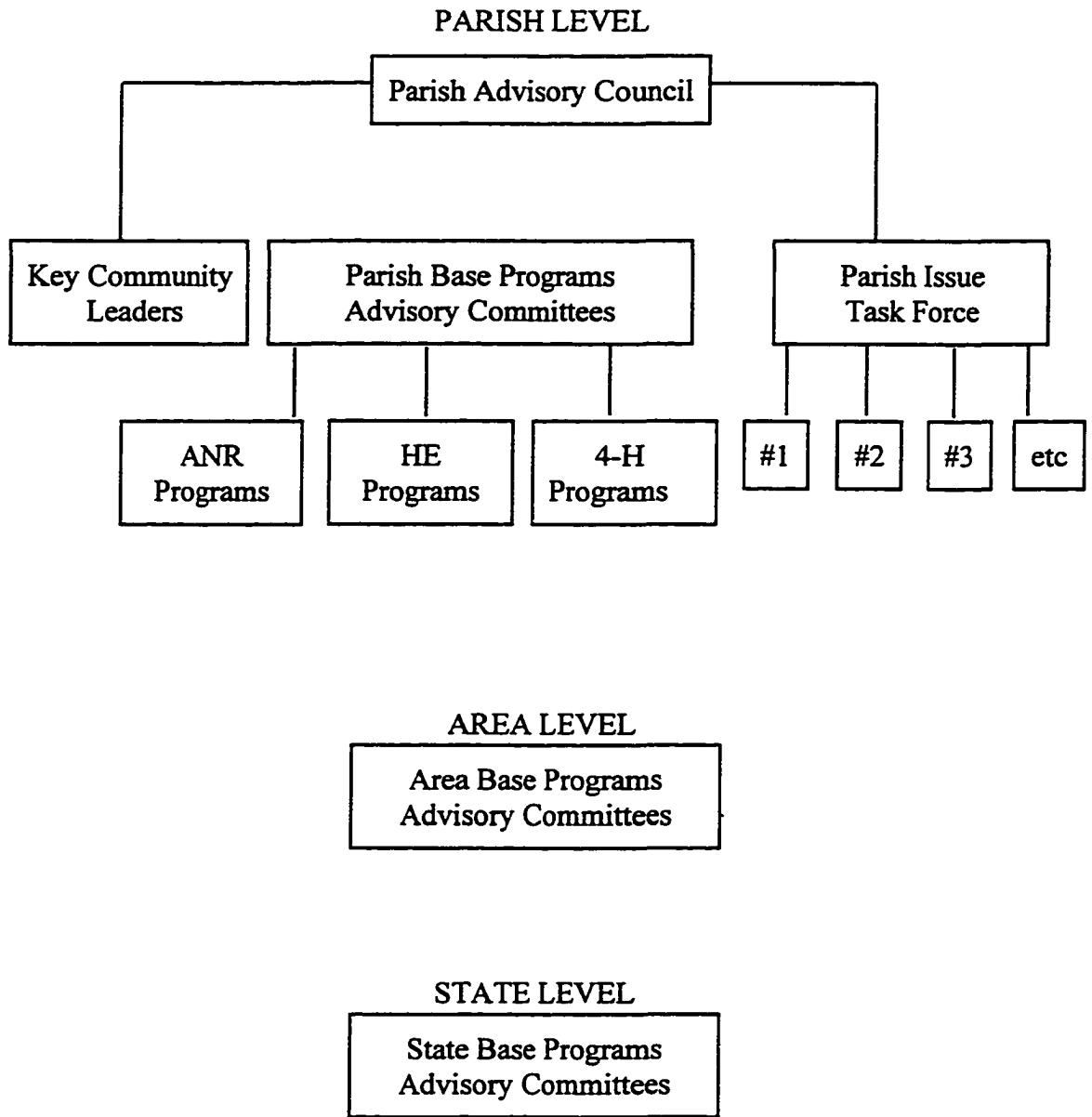
**B. Functions**

1. Identify and prioritize problems within the respective base programs.
2. Assist with audience identification for specific aspects of the base programs.
3. Make suggestions to extension faculty for program planning and implementation to meet audience needs in specific base programs, and assist with evaluation of the programs.

**C. Responsibility of Extension Faculty**

1. While the parish chairman is ultimately responsible to see that Base Programs Advisory Committees in the parish are functioning in an appropriate manner, Extension faculty who are assigned to the program areas are expected to establish, maintain, and operate their respective committees.
2. District agents are responsible for helping Area Agents determine the need for area base programs advisory committees and for direction in organizing and working with these committees. Area agents giving leadership to base programs in a multi-parish area may organize an advisory group in each parish, or an area committee for all parishes in their jurisdiction.
3. State subject-matter specialists are responsible for assisting parish and area personnel with parish and area advisory committees in their respective specialties.





**Figure 1 The LCES Advisory Committee Structure**

Based on a survey of LCES field staff several weaknesses of advisory committees were reported in a 1986 LCES technical report (Louisiana Cooperative Service, 1986):

1. Members were not properly oriented to their task.
2. Members were biased in discussions and decisions.
3. Members did not participate enough in discussions.
4. Situation statements were not complete.
5. Committees did not meet often enough.
6. Inter-agency coordination was a problem.
7. Members were only somewhat involved in implementing programs, and did not participate in program evaluation.

The major finding of this survey was that program planning was being done in most cases. However, there was little involvement of committees in program evaluation, and only slight involvement in program execution. In 1982, a poll of LCES staff in six metropolitan areas of the state revealed that as many as 31 percent of the staff said they used advisory committees always for program evaluation, 43 percent often, 17 percent sometimes, and 9 percent never (Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, 1986). The results of a 1996 electronic mail survey by this researcher revealed that 84 percent of the parishes that reported functioning cotton advisory committees used them for program evaluation. This represents a slightly higher level of use of cotton advisory committees for program evaluation as compared to the 1982 poll.

A 1983 study on community resource development advisory committees in the LCES produced findings that corresponded with the earlier surveys conducted in 1980 and

1982. It was also concluded that both lay members and agents perceived that committees were largely effective in achieving their purposes and functions (Chauhan, 1984).

In a study relating advisory committee leadership with effectiveness, Wegenhoft (1986), reported that agents who did not chair committees perceived committees to be more effective in programming and group process skills.

In a later writing, Wegenhoft (1986) asked the question "are agents doing all the work or are they involving the lay leaders?", and in reply advocated that Extension agents would be doing lay leaders a favor if they let them work. She detailed a six-step plan for letting the committee members begin to assume more responsibility:

1. Develop confidence in your lay leaders. Get to know your committee members.
2. If you have been chairing a committee, let a member take on that responsibility, and provide adequate training for them.
3. Develop a good relationship with the chairperson.
4. Be prepared for the advisory committee meetings.
5. Include the advisory committee in carrying out the program goals and evaluation.
6. Let go of the committee. Relax and watch your lay leaders go to work.

Gamon (1987) offered some ideas to develop Extension councils and committees that are interested and supportive. Convenient, right-sized, action-oriented, personally rewarding-these are time-tested, never-fail guidelines for successful councils or committees. Essentially, they involve looking at the advisory council or committee from the members'

viewpoint. To effectively address the needs and concerns of the cotton industry in Louisiana, it is very important to look at the advisory committee process from the members' prospective.

Meier (1989) stated that Extension historically has concentrated on doing things right, but in the years to come it will be necessary to do the right things right at the right time and in the right place. To accomplish this, the LCES must devote sufficient time and effort to developing the advisory committee system and keeping it functioning. If the LCES is to remain a principal source of information for the cotton commodity clientele, while addressing new emerging issues, it must identify the necessary organizational and programming changes that will be needed to prepare for the future. The advisory committee system can be a key component in identifying needed change. The organization must organize its priorities, and place the recruitment of new advisory committee members and development of committee leadership as a top consideration.

Is preparation of future advisory committee leaders for the organization necessary? Certainly, this function is crucial for moving Extension forward. Extension currently is failing to keep up with societal changes. The primary problem of Extension appears to be its present functioning mindset, a mindset that seems to be one of survival rather than one of potential. Extension appears to be more concerned with management than leadership (Geasler, 1993). The preparation of future leadership for the organization is more important now than ever before. With new problems, programs, technology, audiences, and trends facing Extension constantly, the need for adequately prepared advisory committee members

is essential for the organization to continue to be a leader in providing information to groups like the cotton producers of Louisiana.

It has been this researcher's observation that for many years the Extension organization has simply waited for leaders to emerge. Often new committee members have drifted onto committees because they had been active in Extension programs or maybe just because they were there and willing. Sometimes clientele have been drafted for leadership roles without any preparation. And sometimes it has been hard to account for exactly why an individual has been placed on an advisory committee or in a position of leadership.

A 1988 report of the Presidential Task Force on the Future of Cooperative Extension at the University of New Hampshire recommended that the make-up, role and method of selection of county extension councils must be reviewed. In response to this recommendation, a survey was developed and sent to all 126 members of New Hampshire's advisory councils. One area of concern that emerged as a result of the survey was the way people become Extension council members. Almost half of those that responded said they were on the council as a result of action by Extension educators. Another 41 percent said they were on the council as a result of balloting done in an audience with very strong Extension ties (Black, Howe, Howell & Bedker, 1992).

Reliance on a narrow, specific audience to provide advice and leadership may have caused some of the concern expressed by the cotton clientele in regard to LCES programming. This researcher believes that more highly organized and deliberate attempts to develop advisory committee membership and leadership that reflects the views of the

Louisiana cotton industry may be needed to adequately provide information for Extension programming.

Good organizations have leadership at all levels. Bennis (1985) warns that the notion that leadership exists only at the top of an organization is a myth. The notion that top-down directives will bring about change is also a myth. Leadership involves developing individuals at all levels. Often, attention is given only to the committee chair, but to have qualified individuals prepared for chairmanship positions, training must start at the lower levels of committee work. Extension must be pro active in developing new cotton advisory committee members as well as leadership within these committees.

Organizations must have leaders. However, leaders aren't very effective without followers. In fact, many followers would make good leaders if given the proper training. Such is the case in many rural communities (Rohs, 1988). The Extension System must work to develop new committee members, leadership, and support within the cotton industry. Extension should strive to identify individuals within the cotton industry ranks that have potential leadership or advisory qualities, and make a strong effort to enhance the abilities of these people.

Leadership is a human activity which has been studied with ever-increasing intensity. It is easy to see that a viable and self-renewing organization must have capable leadership (Lippitt, 1969). The Cooperative Extension Service and the cotton industry are both currently experiencing a period of extremely rapid change, the most rapid and significant in history. As Extension faces changing times, the need for forward-thinking leadership, strong support, and sound advice from clientele will become even more evident.

It is the opinion of this researcher that development of future leaders within Cooperative Extension Service clientele ranks is critical for the continued growth and stability of the organization. Adequately prepared leaders within the cotton advisory committee structure are essential, if Extension is to address the needs of a changing world.

A primary role of the land grant university and the Extension Service has been to create, adapt, and extend new technology to solve problems. The clientele for its teaching, research, and extension was once mostly farmers, ranchers, and other rural citizens. Today, the audience includes all of society. Similarly, issues facing the land grant institutions are no longer strictly agricultural, for even the smallest of controversies has implications reaching far beyond the farm gate. Many issues are larger and more complex than ever before (Nuckton, Carter & Cleaves, 1992). Louisiana cotton producers face many issues that reach far beyond on-farm production problems. Areas such as biotechnology, pesticide safety, water quality, and international marketing affect them and all of society. As the LCES develops programs to meet the changing needs of cotton producers, clientele advisory committees will be more important than ever to guide the organization into the future and implement programs that will serve existing needs, while addressing new issues of concern that may impact all of society. The LCES must have advisory committee members that are well trained and prepared to provide this guidance.

#### Other Related Extension Studies

Scholl (1989) found that Extension home economists used advisory committees as a major source of information. Etling (1995), in a review of the Pennsylvania Cooperative

Extension Needs Assessment Handbook, found that in Pennsylvania, the most popular needs assessment techniques were group discussion with advisory committees.

Many critical issues that Extension may address are important to people no matter where they live (Tandl, 1991). Advisory committees can be an important part of non-traditional Extension programs. They may also function long after the project is finished. In New Haven, Connecticut, the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension Service has been successfully involved in formal education through an inner-city high school. The program was first started with a small planning grant that was funded by the Hazen Foundation in New Haven. So that the project might continue after the completion of the grant, Extension helped establish an advisory board. Through this board's efforts, scholarships for further education were sought. The board was also instrumental in convincing the New Haven Board of Education to approve funding for the half-time position of the project coordinator for at least the next year (McKenna & Barber, 1987).

Some advisory committees have very long-term effects. In southeastern Idaho, range livestock production is a major industry. Beef program development committees formed in the early 1950s remained viable in the 1980s (Henson, 1987). Williamson (1951) described a concept similar to advisory councils that was used in Louisiana as early as 1925. The Extension Service at that time organized community programs for the purpose of better living. The first organized community was Calhoun, Louisiana. The community decided to organize a church, build a better school, and beautify the village. In time all their objectives were accomplished. Several other communities across the state used this Extension-sponsored program to improve their living conditions and accomplish similar



objectives. Extension-sponsored beautification and community development groups are still in existence today. People addressing issues of concern, with help from Extension agents through the use of committees, has been ongoing for many years in Louisiana.

Not too many years ago, the issues programming was new to Extension. Today, this concept is widespread in many Extension systems. In 1986, Texas began an extensive, long-range program planning process which is now termed issues programming. Issues programming began in Louisiana in 1988. Former Louisiana Extension Director Denver T. Loupe, directed faculty to broaden the input into advisory groups to include individuals, groups and organizations which had not been represented (Baker, 1992).

A focal point of issues programming is the county advisory committee. In Wisconsin, in 1989, the dean of Cooperative Extension appointed a small work group to design and implement a strategic planning process for issues programming. One of the key steps in the strategic planning effort was the formation of citizen advisory committees. Fifty-eight percent of the citizens were nonusers of Extension, and it was the first experience with Extension programs for many (Fitzsimmons & Campbell, 1992). When issues programming was incorporated into program planning for the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, citizen advisory committees were a key part of the process. Similar to Wisconsin, it was found that for many of these committee members, it was the first experience with Extension programs. Even though issues programming was a new concept, the original concept of advisory committees was a key component in the programming process, and brought about the involvement of new clientele in Extension programs (Baker, 1992).

Throughout this century, major changes-first in transportation, and then in communications, computers, and satellite technologies-have greatly impacted methods of informal adult education. These changes provide an opportunity to gain greater efficiency in program delivery, while still serving people with quality educational opportunities (Rockwell, 1993). To ensure Extension's future, quality programs must be developed, marketed, and evaluated. Extension cannot afford to be shy. Our current funding will be small compared to future program needs. If we are to survive, quality programs must be developed to help people meet their everyday needs (Rohs, 1988). There are many high quality Extension cotton education programs in Louisiana, but continued commitment and support from this clientele group of stakeholders must be maintained. Clientele, decision makers, and taxpayers are more interested in what Extension accomplishes than in structure (Conone, 1992). Stakeholders need to be aware of the impact Extension programs are having on economic vitality, environmental quality, sustainable agriculture, and improved production. Cotton producers are more interested in what is done than in how it is done.

In mid-1994, the "Marketing Extension to Louisiana" project was initiated. A faculty task force, established to lead this project, identified an immediate need for a survey of the public's image of Extension.

In the fall of 1994, LCES conducted a telephone interview survey. The survey was intended to determine public awareness, user satisfaction, and potential usefulness of Extension and Extension programs, and to compare rural and urban audiences on these factors. This survey obtained some interesting results that are related to the perceived value of Extension programs.

Awareness of the 4-H youth program was greatest (49.6%), followed by agriculture (27.2%). Rural respondents were more aware of LCES and all programs than urban respondents. Over 40 percent of all respondents knew there was an Extension office in their parish. Twice as many rural as urban respondents knew there was a parish Extension office. From two to three times as many rural as urban respondent users were very satisfied with all programs. Rural respondents ratings were higher than urban respondents for usefulness of basic Extension programs.

As can be seen from the results of this survey, compared to urban audiences, the rural audiences were more aware of Extension and its programs. In addition, they used programs more and were more satisfied with them, and more of them believed the programs would be useful to their families (Verma & Burns, 1995). Findings from this survey clearly substantiated that Extension programs are of value to both rural and urban clientele, but do carry stronger support from the rural audience.

Continuing the emphasis on LCES' agricultural programs highlights the principle of building on organization strengths. Historically, agricultural programs have been the primary focus of Extension work, especially in rural areas where LCES' agricultural programs enjoy relatively higher awareness and high satisfaction levels. The 1994 LCES marketing survey revealed that both home gardening and agricultural programs were deemed useful by over one-third of the urban population (Verma & Burns, 1995). A clear opportunity exists for LCES to build on the strengths of the current agricultural program.

The survey results indicated that while the general public was somewhat aware of Extension, only a small percentage of Louisianians used LCES programs. However, a

majority of the users were satisfied with the programs. An important finding of the survey was that practically all Extension programs were perceived by Louisianians as potentially useful in improving family life (Verma & Burns, 1995).

Based on the experience of this researcher, cotton producers perceive Extension programs to be of primary importance in providing current production agriculture information and leadership for the cotton industry. Programs provided to cotton producers continue to be a mainstay of Extension in cotton producing areas. Most producers view the local Extension office as being an invaluable, unbiased source of production information. They equate Extension with sustained profitability of their farms. A single recommendation from a professional Extension agent may result in several thousand dollars in profit or prevention of loss. The results of on-farm demonstration work may change production methods and result in greater yields and profits. Extension must be able to show the value of programs and recommendations. This has been done with some success in other states.

In a county in Ohio a situation occurred that forced Extension to do this very thing. Reduced tax revenues and the cost of a new county jail led to two years of budget cuts. Funding for the Extension office had been reduced by 70 percent. It became necessary to rethink traditional approaches to documenting Extension impact. It was decided to determine what revenues Extension programming generated for the county general fund. Did Extension pay its own way?

Each program area was scrutinized to determine if new businesses, increased sales, or new jobs resulted from the teaching activities. It was demonstrated that over \$78,000 in new income was generated for the county general fund that year. It was also demonstrated

that Extension activities saved the county over \$55,000. Activities documented included: consultant work provided by agents, litter prevention programs, savings as individuals got off welfare roles, and children kept out of detention homes by 4-H involvement. New income generated combined with the savings documented showed that Extension had a positive impact of almost \$140,000 on the county general fund. The total Extension budget from the county was only \$50,000. Three weeks after the report was released a \$30,000 increase in the Extension budget was approved (Owen, Ludwig & Thorne, 1988). We must not overlook the local economic value of Extension programs.

How can Extension programs measure economic development impacts that are a result of their programs? This was the question that was asked in a study of the economic impact potential of Extension forestry programming in southeastern Oklahoma. A 10-county regional economy was studied, where timber makes up 10 percent of the region's output and accounts for six percent of the regional employment.

It was determined that forestry workshops could increase regional timber production value by 50 percent resulting in 81 new permanent jobs. A 50 percent increase in regional timber production could generate a \$7.5 million increase in added value.

Analyzing Extension's impact in this manner provides planners with information about how the current economy will react to a change in the output of a given sector. Extension programs can focus on economic development objectives (Marcouiller, Ray, Schreiner & Lewis, 1992).

As illustrated by the two examples cited above, it is possible to establish the value of Extension education programs and services. Extension is a complex organization.

Members of complex organizations are rational. Their behavior is motivated by existing institutional incentives: supervisory pressures, professional expectations, and pressures generated by the local environment. Local pressures relate to workloads, resource allocations, and stakeholder expectations. They are dynamic, political, and sometimes controversial, and may place the individual in conflict with institutional philosophy and supervisory pressures (Bahn, 1991). Extension must involve stakeholders in programs and foster the understanding of their importance to their industry. One of the first steps will be the identification of concerns relating to the value of Extension programs. The advisory committee system can be a key in this identification process. To continue receiving funding and support, Extension must determine the value of programs and deliver this information to major stakeholders. The advisory committee system can be a key part of determining and reporting the value of Extension programs to major stakeholders in the cotton industry.

### The Research Model

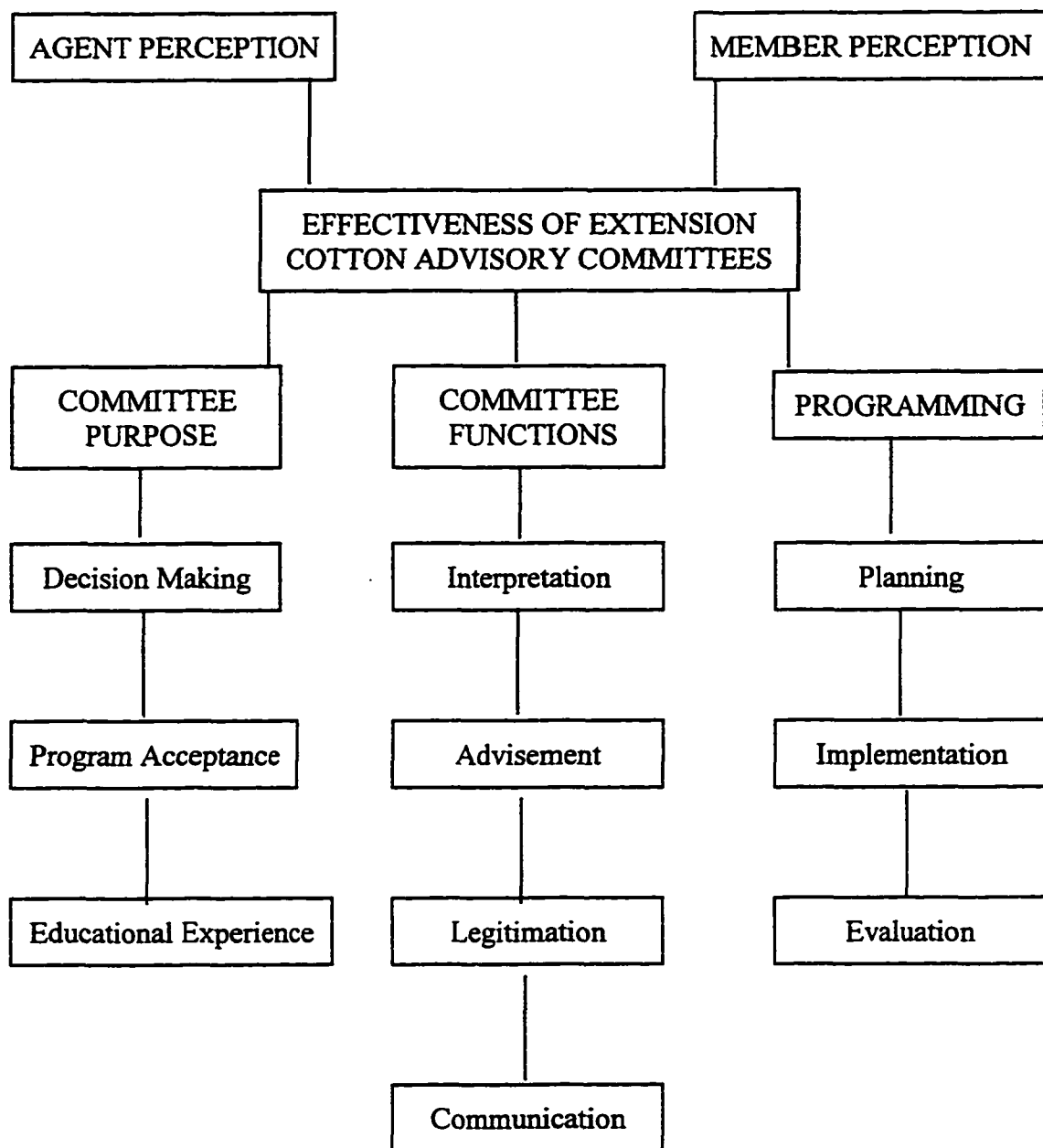
The review of literature reveals some research on the effectiveness of Extension advisory committees, but none on cotton advisory committees. The Cole model discussed earlier in this review suggests that structural variables, programming skills, and group process skills are useful indicators of effectiveness. An absence of, or weakness in, any of the three components will result in a less effective committee.

Cole and Cole (1983) also state that a major function of advisory committees is evaluation. There are many reasons or purposes for evaluation. One purpose that may greatly impact Extension programs is to obtain evidence favoring a program to rally support or obtain evidence against a program to rally opposition.

Pesson (1966) suggested a rationale for Extension advisory committees in terms of its purposes and functions. He states that three basic premises underlie the concept of advisory groups. First, the involvement of representative lay people in the planning process will speed up the process of educational change among people. Second, the involvement of representative lay people will result in "better" decisions when compared with those made by the professional staff alone. Third, the involvement of the individual in planning activities is a beneficial learning experience. By participating in the analysis of the local situation, compared with the ideal, participants in planning committees should be better informed and better prepared for active leadership in the process of change. Pesson goes on to indicate that the primary functions of advisory committees in Extension are advisement, interpretation, legitimation, and communication.

Advisement refers to the giving of advice by lay leaders to professionals, based on an interpretation of the situation. Interpretation means studying the situation to determine its significance. Legitimation refers to the influence that the actions and words of some people have on the behavior patterns of others. Those committee members who have influence with others and approve or disapprove an idea or a practice will have an effect on the behaviors of others, especially if their actions are communicated to others. Communication is spreading the decision made by committees among the general public (Chauhan, 1984).

The major focus of this study is on the perception of lay members and Extension field agents regarding the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees. The research model guiding the study is depicted in Figure 2.



**Figure 2 The Research Model of Extension Cotton Advisory Committees Effectiveness**



This model focuses on agent and member perception of committee purpose, committee functions, and programming. Committee purpose will be studied in terms of decision making, program acceptance, and educational experience. Committee functions will be studied in terms of interpretation, advisement, legitimation, and communication. Programming will be studied in terms of planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The extent to which lay members and agents agree that Extension cotton advisory committees have been effective as judged by these indicators would be an asset to programming. It is expected that the study would provide useful information for improving the cotton advisory committee structure and Extension programming.

### Qualitative Research Methods

The dominant thought process or paradigm that has been used in social and behavioral science is the hypothetico-deductive methodology. This method, called the "scientific method," assumes quantitative measurement, experimental design and statistical analysis (Patton, 1990). It comes from the tradition of experimentation in agriculture which has provided many of the basic statistical and experimental techniques. Patton felt that the label "research" has come to mean employing the "scientific method" (Patton, 1978).

Donald Campbell and Lee Cronbach, who were considered as the major spokespersons for the hypothetico-deductive methodology, came to advocate the appropriateness and usefulness of qualitative methods (Patton, 1990). Qualitative methods are holistic-inductive and are aimed at understanding social phenomena. They use the techniques of in-depth, open-ended interviewing, and personal observation.

The major types of qualitative research employed in the United States at the present time are focus groups, motivation research, and depth interviews (Greenbaum, 1988). Qualitative research, and especially the procedure known as the group depth interview or "focus group", is one of the most important, the most widely used, and arguably, the most psychologically valid tool of market research. The number of group interview projects commissioned each year far exceeds the number of surveys, and group interviews are now used for a wide range of purposes beyond traditional marketing applications. The group depth interview traces its roots to the diverse methods of the behavioral scientist and the psychotherapist. "Focus groups," the popular term that most often identifies the technique, derives initially from the method of interviewing individual respondents developed by Robert K. Merton, the well-known sociologist (Goldman & McDonald, 1987).

#### The Focus Group Interview

Basic methods used in qualitative studies involve the individual depth interview and the group in-depth interview, or focus group interview. The individual interview usually lasts 45 minutes to 1 hour and is made up mostly of open-ended questions (Goldman and McDonald, 1987). Often 50 or more of these individual interviews are conducted in a single qualitative study. The literature documents that the individual process often is costly and has been the concern of scientists since the 1980s. Information or points of view of the highest value may not be disclosed because the direction given the interview by the questioner leads away from them. The result of these concerns is for social scientists to develop methods where the researcher plays a less dominant and less directive role (Krueger, 1988). The most commonly used resulting method is the focus group interview.

The focus group interview assembles eight to ten respondents in the presence of a trained moderator who guides a discussion lasting about two hours. A typical study consists of two to eight of these sessions (Goldman & McDonald, 1987). A set of focus groups typically consists of a minimum of three different discussion groups (Gamon, 1992).

Focus groups were originally used as a market research tool to evaluate potential customer response to new products. Their use has now spread to a variety of organizations interested in the opinions of current or prospective clientele about proposed or ongoing programs. Focus groups are useful for identifying needs and constraints that might be missed through other methods of assessment. Potential programs can be revised before expensive mistakes are made and the focus of existing programs can be re-directed (Gamon, 1992).

The review of literature revealed several uses of focus groups for Extension studies. In 1994, in New Jersey, a focus group approach was used for a coalition building model. The project was named the Cook Study because it took place on the campus of Cook College, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Ninety-six percent of the participants said that the focus group discussions broadened their understanding of the major contributions of agriculture as well as the ways agriculture is perceived to have a negative impact. As a result of the study, action plans were formulated to sustain continued coalition efforts (Tavernier & Hartley, 1994).

A 1993 study conducted in Ohio used focus groups to identify potential impacts of community leadership development programs on program participants' leadership skills (Earnest, 1996). In another Ohio study on diversity of extension administrators, focus group

interviews were held with participants to add a qualitative dimension and assist researchers in understanding the quantitative descriptive data gathered (Ludwig, 1995). A Cornell University research project also used focus groups to study diversity within Cooperative Extension (Ewert & King, 1994).

Focus groups have been used to determine perceptions and factors influencing Extension programs. In selected Iowa communities during the winter of 1992-93, focus groups were used to check youth perceptions of agriculture. The objective of the study was to learn more about middle school students' perceptions of agriculture and the food processing industry in Iowa. The results indicated that groups or others that wish to communicate with Iowa youth should not assume a wide base of awareness about, or interest in, agriculture (Holz-Clause & Jost, 1995). Focus groups were used to assess an extension education program directed to farmers in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, and Pennsylvania. The objective of the study was to profile farmers' adoption of an extension recommended practice. Three focus groups were used with a total of 26 farmers. The focus group interviews revealed that no unique decision making process could be identified for the adoption decision (King & Rollins, 1995).

Focus groups have been used in LCES studies. The LCES used a series of seven focus group interviews to assist in an evaluability assessment of its leadership program (Verma, 1991). The primary objective of this study was to obtain in-depth information on inputs, operations, and impacts associated with this educational program. Baker (1992), used focus group interviews to evaluate the LCES issues programming process.

### Design of Focus Group Interview Studies

The design of the focus group interview is critical to the success of a study (Goldman & McDonald, 1987). Krueger (1988) states that planning begins with consideration of the purpose of the study and is followed by organizing the effort in a logical, sequential manner. He lists the following points to be considered:

Why is the study to be conducted?

What particular information is important?

Who wants and will use the information?

These questions are the keys to proper planning. The answers to these questions need to be shared with the expected users and their feedback incorporated into the study. If this is done and agreement is achieved on these matters, the chance of the information being used is enhanced. Once the purposes for the study have been identified several decisions must be made which consider the following factors:

- A. Group configuration
  - 1. Selection of participants
  - 2. Number in the group
  - 3. Number of groups
- B. Facilities necessary for focus groups
- C. Moderator
- D. Questions to be considered
- E. Data analysis and reporting

### Group Configuration - Selection of Participants

Participants must be selected who will be able to provide comments that are the most relevant and the most informative. The focus group process is " . . . a prism through which we focus our attention and gather rich and detailed information from a relatively limited number of relevant individuals" (Goldman & McDonald, 1987, p.26). The participants should share some characteristic related to the topic. For example, a set of focus groups to discuss a state lottery consisted of people who were religious conservatives and opposed to gambling. The idea is to provide an opportunity for people with a common interest to talk together, so that researchers can get a greater insight into their attitudes and opinions on the topic (Gamon, 1992).

Krueger states that nonprofit and service organizations typically have three categories of individuals who must be included when considering whom to study. They are advisory groups, employees and clients (Krueger, 1988). Other demographic factors like geography, age, gender, income and participation characteristics can be included. He also feels that the purpose of the study must control who is to be involved.

The social scientist is primarily concerned with two principal sources of error, sampling error and measurement error. The absence of sampling error indicates that the people and attitudes that have been sampled are truly representative of the population. Another term that reflects this error is reliability (Goldman & McDonald, 1987). If the study can be replicated with additional samples from that same population and the same results are obtained, then it has a high reliability.

Statistical reliability reflects sample selection and the way the opinions are sampled. Measurement error reflects how well we have measured what we desired to measure. Validity is a term which reflects measurement error or lack thereof.

Sampling design will include decisions that consider both random and purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling is used when the user wants to learn something or understand something about select cases without needing to generalize to all cases. This should be done only if information is known about the variation among cases. This strategy is used when there is a desire for in-depth information about certain cases or critical cases (Patton, 1990). If enough is known about the cases to establish a typical case then the use of this method will save cost and effort. The process of selective sampling is the primary strategy used by researchers with qualitative methods and focus group interviews.

#### Group Configuration - Number in the Focus Group

Goldman and McDonald (1987) indicate that there is widespread agreement that the optimal number of respondents per group is between eight and ten. The number in the focus group can vary from seven to 12 people. Gamon (1992) stated that a focus group should consist of eight to 10 people and over-recruiting is necessary to attract the number of participants needed. Krueger feels that the ideal is seven to 10 (Krueger, 1988). With too few a number one or two individuals may dominate. When the number is large, individuals may wait too long to express their feelings and become frustrated. Larger groups also tend to fragment and are difficult to control.

### Group Configuration - Number of Groups

The number of groups required in any study will depend on several factors. Factors such as availability of facilities and transportation may affect the number of locations. Most research issues can be addressed satisfactorily with no more than six or eight groups, and four are often entirely adequate (Goldman & McDonald, 1987). Gamon (1992) felt that a minimum of three different discussion groups should be used. Krueger (1988) suggests that an ideal rule of thumb is to continue conducting interviews until little new information is provided. Krueger feels that it is appropriate to plan for four focus group sessions but it is possible to evaluate after the third. A larger number of groups is sometimes necessary with very diverse groups or for statewide or nationwide insights (Krueger, 1988).

### Facilities Necessary for Focus Group Interviews

At the time when focus group interviewing was just starting, moderators used any facility that could seat the group and supply power for tape recorders (Goldman & McDonald, 1987). Early sessions were typically conducted in hotel meeting rooms. Experience has taught that the location is important. It must be easy to locate, well identified within its building, well lighted and in a safe area. The layout must provide an "interviewing environment." The room must be of appropriate size, neutral in color and with good acoustics. Outside noise should be minimal.

The temperature should be kept slightly cooler than usual living areas (approximately 72-74 degrees F). This helps participants to function. The most versatile facilities have an adjacent kitchen area.



Seating arrangements can reflect either a living room setting or a conference room arrangement. The conference style interview room is furnished with a large table, normally round, with twelve chairs for participants. The round table provides the best eye contact and no one has a more or less preferred seat. Interviewers who prefer this arrangement feel that the close physical seating encourages social interaction and alertness. The living room arrangement tries to mimic a warm cozy, informal home environment with comfortable chairs placed more or less randomly in the room. Goldman and McDonald (1987) indicate the conference room arrangement is the most common and is desired by most professional moderators.

The facilities should include viewing rooms large enough to accommodate several observers. The viewing room should be separated from the interviewing room by a one-way mirror. The trend is to video-tape the focus group interview. The rooms need to be equipped to facilitate this equipment.

### Moderator

The verbal activity of the moderator or interviewer is determined by the nature of the group. When the group is made up of alert and articulate individuals the moderator can assume a more passive role. Krueger (1988) states that the role of the moderator is to guide the discussion and that they should exercise a mild, unobtrusive control over the group. The groups seem to work best when the leader is a stranger. The role of the leader is important. The leader should be trained through observations of expert focus-group interviewers and should read suggested procedures carefully. The leader's wording and sequence of the interview questions requires careful thought (Gamon, 1992). The literature shows that

effective focus group interview techniques require skill in four key areas: listening, paraphrasing, probing and note taking.

### Questions for Focus Group Interviews

The proceedings must begin with the disclosure of any audio and/or video taping, and of the one-way mirror, if used. This disclosure is required by the Code of Ethics of the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (Goldman & McDonald, 1987).

The central purpose of the introduction is to describe the purpose of the session and there should be no lack of clarity about the subject under discussion. The following check list can be used to open the session (Goldman & McDonald, 1987):

1. Moderator's name.
2. The subject under discussion is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The moderator would like to use participants' first names and would like them to use his or her first name.
4. The role that he/she plans to play as moderator (" . . . Keeping the discussion focused on the topic," etc.)
5. Participants are free to speak when they have something to say.
6. People should not speak at the same time.
7. The group is being tape recorded.
8. There is a one-way vision mirror.
9. There are observers.
10. Participants are encouraged to talk to each other and not just to the moderator.

11. Participants are encouraged to be candid in their assignment of the concept.
12. The moderator has no vested interest in the success of the concept per se.
13. Participants will not be quoted by name in the report

Ideally, the opening question should be a provocative one that invites reflection rather than a simple "yes" or "no". The opening question should force each participant to open up, talk and contribute something related to the subject as early as possible in the session. Professional moderators feel that if this is done the need for other warmup efforts may be eliminated. In this early portion of the session, a supportive, non-evaluating climate should be established (Goldman & McDonald, 1987).

Krueger suggests opening questions that put the participant back into the environment of the focused program. Statements like "think back" are useful. A short written questionnaire at the beginning can also focus attention on the topic (Krueger, 1988).

The questions in the interview are designed to uncover the thoughts of the participants. Questions that can be answered "yes" or "no" are seldom used (Krueger, 1988). The more open-ended the question the better, as long as the direction of the study can be maintained. Occasionally, the moderator may discover a question within the flow of a focus group that had not occurred in the planning process. Care must be taken to not lose the planned flow of the session, but these questions may be useful at the end of the session.

Normally, there will be less than 10 questions covered in a focus group interview. Frequently, the total will be five or six (Krueger, 1988). The session length must control the number of questions.

The plan for questioning should be to move from the general to the specific. The organization of questions begins with general overview questions and progresses to more specific questions of more critical interest (Krueger, 1988).

It is often desirable to have a moderator guide. A moderator guide is a document which outlines the planned flow of discussion in a focus group session. The purpose is to assure that the moderator covers the desired material with the appropriate priorities (Greenbaum, 1988).

Greenbaum (1988) lists the following as components of the ideal moderator guide:

1. A statement of the group objectives
2. Identification of the group composition
3. Introduction instructions
4. Warm-up topics (if used)
5. General topic discussion
6. Specific questions for discussion
7. Closing plan

#### Focus Group Data Analysis and Reporting

Analysis begins with going back to the original intent of the study (Krueger, 1988). Goldman and McDonald (1987) state that the analysis should be started as soon after the groups are completed as the schedule allows.

The data generated by focus group interviews may be voluminous. The data will take the form of interview transcripts, tapes, moderator notes and/or observer notes. Patton (1990) feels that through input analysis, patterns, themes and categories of analysis come

from the data rather than being imposed prior to the collection of data. The process of identifying, coding and categorizing the primary patterns in the data, is called content analysis (Patton, 1990). The first step in content analysis is to label the various kinds of data and establish a data index. Content analysis falls or stands by its categories. Categories can be classified into two basic types: those deriving specifically from content or what is said, and those deriving from how it is said.

Krueger (1988) suggests that analysis be conceptualized as a continuum from raw data to descriptive statements to interpretation. Raw data can be presented using the exact statements of the participants. These statements might be put in categories and ordered. The presentation of raw data usually involves all responses. In the descriptive statements section, the researcher may use the raw data to develop a brief description of the participant comments and use a limited number of these comments as illustrative examples. Interpretation is the most complex task. The researcher builds on the descriptive process by presenting the meaning of the data as opposed to a summary of the data.

Krueger (1990) suggests that the reporting of qualitative data take the form of oral reports, written reports or a combination of the two. He says that a combination is best. Patton (1990) agrees with Krueger that a combination of oral and written reports has the greatest influence on decision makers.

Greenbaum (1988) indicates the purpose of a focus group report is to (a) provide a written summary of the results, (b) give the client the moderator's interpretation of the findings, (c) serve as a means of communicating the findings to key people in the user organization, and (d) serve to stimulate the next action steps to achieve the overall

objectives. He recommends three types of reports; oral, summary moderator and detailed moderator reports. The literature supports the use of a combination of oral and written reports as best.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This study was designed to evaluate the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) advisory committee system as it relates to the cotton industry of Louisiana. The study was conducted statewide with a selected sample of Extension agents and clientele representing the two major cotton-producing areas of the state. The study included members of parish advisory committees and LCES personnel involved in programming related to the cotton industry. The data was obtained through focus group interviews. The focus group interview was used as the method for data collection because it provides an opportunity for group interaction and greater insight into why certain opinions are held (Krueger, 1988).

The data obtained was analyzed using standard methodology used in qualitative data. The findings were used to make recommendations to modify the existing cotton advisory structure and/or to guide future programming.

#### **Population and Samples**

The Louisiana cotton industry involves producers and Extension agents in over 22 of the 64 parishes in the state. There are 4,014 producers involved in cotton production in these parishes (Louisiana Summary Agriculture and Natural Resources, 1996). The producers are served by 30 field agents with support from state specialists. Nineteen parishes have functioning cotton advisory committees.

The two groups that have the most knowledge of the cotton advisory system in Louisiana are the advisory committee members and parish Extension agents. Krueger states that organizations need to include typically three categories of individuals when considering whom to study. They are advisory groups, clients and employees (Krueger, 1988). In this study the parish Extension agents formed the employee category. Members of the parish advisory committees represented the advisory group and clients. Researchers seeking quantifiable data recognize that surveys of fewer than 100 respondents tend to be cost-inefficient, and that subgroups of less than 35 are statistically unstable. The qualitative researcher, however, is thrust back upon experience, judgment and intuition when making decisions on the number of groups because statistical significance and sample size are irrelevant. Geographic, ethnic and social diversity as well as facilities and transportation need to be considered when deciding the number of focus group interviews to conduct. Most research issues can be addressed with no more than six or eight groups, and four is often adequate (Goldman & McDonald, 1987).

Social and ethnic diversity is considered when parish advisory committees are formed. The decision on the number of focus groups, therefore, emphasized geographic considerations and facilities available. Krueger (1988) suggests that an ideal rule of thumb is to continue conducting interviews until little new information is provided. Typically the first two groups will produce most of the new information and by the fourth session few new ideas or thoughts emerge. He feels that it is appropriate to plan for four focus group sessions but it is possible to evaluate after the third. Goldman and McDonald (1987) feel a typical study may require two or three groups, at this number of locations, but certainly



no more than four. For this study, six focus group interviews were conducted - four sessions for cotton advisory committee members and two for LCES agents. Geographically, one interview was conducted for agents and three for cotton producers in Northeast Louisiana, and one interview for each respondent group in Central Louisiana. Sites were Winnsboro (two clientele groups) and Monroe for the northeast portion, and Alexandria for the central portion of the state. The reason for conducting three interviews for producers in the northeast was that over 90 percent of all the cotton producers and 85 percent of the cotton acreage are in the northeast part of the state. The Winnsboro and Monroe locations allowed for the inclusion of all cotton-producing parishes in the northeast, keeping travel time to less than 1.5 hours. Two sessions were conducted at the Winnsboro location to insure adequate representation at the site located in the geographic center of the largest cotton producing area. The Alexandria location allowed for the inclusion of all cotton-producing parishes in the Red River area and Central Louisiana, keeping travel time to within 1.5 hours. The literature states that the optimum focus group size is between 7 and 12 individuals. Gamon (1992) recommends over-recruiting to attract the number of participants needed. An attempt was made to have the optimum number per session.

The sample population consisted of parish (county) level extension agents and cotton advisory committee members who were currently serving, or had served recently on parish cotton advisory committees. The sample represented two major geographic areas of the state that are involved in cotton production. Both large and small acreage producers were included. Some agents were currently in administration (parish chairs). This gave a

broad determination of what is perceived by both extension agents and clientele throughout the state.

### Procedure

To collect preliminary data for this study of cotton producers and Extension agents, a survey was conducted using the LCES electronic mail system to determine which parishes had functioning cotton advisory committees. Nineteen parishes reporting a functioning advisory committee were used to form the sample of producer-members. Active cotton producers serving on these advisory committees were included as participants. Three participants were also agricultural consultants. Each parish reporting a functioning advisory committee was asked to be represented by at least one producer and one agent. Producer participants for the Monroe location were drawn from the parishes of Caldwell, Morehouse, Ouachita, Richland, and West Carroll. Producer participants for the Winnsboro location were drawn from the parishes of Catahoula, Concordia, East Carroll, Franklin, Madison, and Tensas. Producer participants for the Alexandria location were drawn from the parishes of Avoyelles, Caddo, Bossier, Grant, Natchitoches, Pointe Coupee, Rapides, and St. Landry. Agent focus groups were conducted in Monroe and Alexandria. Agents representing the following parishes were included: Avoyelles, Bossier, Caddo, Caldwell, Catahoula, Concordia, East Carroll, Franklin, Grant, Madison, Morehouse, Natchitoches, Ouachita, Pointe Coupee, Rapides, Richland, St. Landry, Tensas, and West Carroll. Agent participants were selected by the researcher. An equal number of agents was assigned to the Monroe and Alexandria locations. Assignments were based on travel distance involved.

Support for this research was given by Extension Director Dr. Jack Bagent. A request was made to Director Bagent that he write all Extension agents in these parishes and ask for their cooperation. A letter was sent to all agents involved by Director Bagent using the LCES electronic mail system. A letter was written by the researcher to the Extension agents in the selected parishes asking for the names of committee members who were currently serving on their parish cotton advisory committee or had recently served. Based on the acreage and number of producers in each parish the following number of member participants was drawn .

**Monroe Location (14)**

Ouachita	2	Morehouse	3
Caldwell	2	West Carroll	3
Richland	4		

**Winnsboro Location (18)**

East Carroll	3	Madison	3
Tensas	3	Franklin	4
Catahoula	3	Concordia	2

**Alexandria Location (14)**

Caddo	2	Bossier	1
Natchitoches	2	Pointe Coupee	2
Grant	1	Rapides	2
Avoyelles	2	St. Landry	2

The total number of producer participants selected was 46. Fourteen participants were selected at the Monroe location, 18 at the Winnsboro location (2 sessions) and 14 at the Alexandria location. The literature states that usually the maximum number of participants in focus groups should be 12. Gamon (1992) recommends over-recruiting to attract the number of participants needed. It was the opinion of this researcher that the slightly larger number was needed to insure adequate representation by producers.

The LCES is organized in five administrative areas within the state. Each of these areas is administered by a district agent. Cotton-producing parishes are located in four administrative areas. A total of 30 field agents are involved in the Extension cotton program. These agents are located in 22 parishes within these 4 administrative areas. A request was made to Director Bagent that he contact the four district agents and ask for their cooperation. A letter was then written by the researcher to the district agents asking that they allow agents who were involved in the Extension cotton education program within the designated parishes to participate in the focus group interviews. All district agents responded and gave their approval. Agents for the focus group sessions were selected from the designated parishes. A total sample of 20 agents was drawn (10 for each focus group session). Attention was given to the geographic location of the agents drawn to determine if the Monroe or Alexandria location would be best for keeping travel time to a minimum.

Letters were sent to each selected agent enclosing copies to the appropriate administrators. Follow-up contact was made to confirm participation. Letters informing the producer participants of the focus group sessions were prepared by the researcher and sent, with a return reply post card to confirm attendance. These letters provided a brief

explanation of the session, the date and location. Follow-up letters were sent to selected producer participants urging participation by Director Bagent, Ms. Donna Winters, President of the Louisiana Cotton Producers Association, and Mr. Ronnie Anderson, President of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation. After an appropriate time period, a second letter was prepared by the researcher and sent to the producer participants who had not responded, further explaining the effort and encouraging their attendance. A follow-up post card was sent to producer participants by the researcher as a reminder of the date, time and location. Appendix A contains these letters and post cards. Follow-up telephone calls were made by the researcher as needed.

### Instrumentation

The instrument in a focus group interview involves the facility, the moderator and the questioning plan. Adequate facilities were located in each of these cities that provided appropriate atmosphere and acceptable conditions for audio and video taping.

The moderator for focus group interviews plays a key role. One of the moderator's principal responsibilities is to provide a conversational environment in which participants feel free to express views with candor and sincerity. The moderator must be knowledgeable of the purpose of the study. Experience and objectivity is critical (Goldman & McDonald, 1987). Individuals not assigned to an Extension parish staff and not associated with parish cotton advisory committees were selected as the moderators. These individuals had expertise in group dynamics. Meetings were held with the moderators prior to the interviews to aid in preparation for the interviews.

The questions were ordered to move the group from the more general to the specific. The opening question served the purpose of warming up the group and getting each individual to speak and contribute. The first question was used to "force" the participants back into the environment of the focused program (Krueger, 1988). There were six questions used in each focus group. The agents questions were worded in a slightly different way than the producer participants questions. The two sets of questions are shown in Appendix B. A panel of LCES faculty with a working knowledge of Extension programming and advisory committees was asked to review and assess the questioning plan. This panel consisted of Dr. Severn Doughty, District Agent, Dr. Rosalie Bivin, Assistant Director for Field Operations, Dr. Jack Bagent, Director of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, Dr. Earl Johnson, Specialist, Program and Staff Development, Ms. Pam Hodson, LCES Area Communications Agent, Ms. Michele Abington-Cooper, Home Economist Public Education, and Dr. Stephen Mullen, Division Leader 4-H Youth. The purpose of this review was to determine if the questioning plan was appropriate for the objectives of the study. The questioning plan was then completed with help from the moderators and Dr. Satish Verma, Professor, School of Vocational Education. As suggested in the literature, the moderators were prepared to make deviations as the direction of the focus groups evolved. The closing question allowed any comments that the participants wanted to add to the discussion. The sessions lasted between one and one half to two hours.

## Data Analysis

The purpose of qualitative inquiry is to produce findings. The culminating activities are analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings. The challenge is to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal. Because qualitative inquiry depends, at every stage, on the skills, training, insights, and capabilities of the researcher, qualitative analysis ultimately depends on the analytical intellect and style of the analyst. The human factor is the great strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis (Patton, 1990).

Patton says the first task in qualitative analysis is description or focusing the analysis. He suggests that the researcher then organize the data. After the data have been organized, the researcher can perform content analysis. This is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data. The researcher can then move to inductive analysis, looking for patterns, themes, and categories. Patton states that these will emerge out of the data. The evaluator-analyst should look for recurring regularities in the data. These regularities represent patterns than can be sorted into categories. The researcher should also look for natural variation in the data.

There are two ways of representing the patterns that emerge from analysis of the data. First, the analyst can use the categories developed and articulated by the people studied to organize presentation of particular themes. Second, the analyst may become aware of categories or patterns for which the people studied did not have labels or terms,

and the analyst develops terms to describe these inductively generated categories (Patton, 1990).

Data in this qualitative study were in the form of video and audio tapes, and moderator and researcher notes. The analysis of data began immediately following each interview. The moderator and the researcher assessed the quality of the recorded tapes and compared thoughts as to interview content. The tapes were used to extract individual messages and to summarize by question the focus group interview participant comments.

Table 1 shows the steps in the data analysis procedure. Steps 1 - 4 included identification of individual messages in the agent and producer groups followed by sorting of these messages into naturally occurring categories. The categories were compared and common categories combined. Tables were produced showing the identified categories.

Summaries were prepared for each question by group and the groups compared (Step 5). A summary of each of these comparisons was prepared. An action/situation-outcome table was developed from the individual question summaries (Step 6). A summary of each of these question comparisons was prepared (Step 7).

Steps 8 and 9 consisted of extracting themes from the agent and producer summary comparisons, and as a final step, combining these sets of themes into common perception patterns.



**Table 1. Steps in data analysis**

<b>Interview Data Analysis Procedure</b>		
<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Agent and Producer Individual Messages Identified</b>	
<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Agent and Producer Messages Sorted by Groups Into Naturally Occurring Categories</b>	
<b>Step 3</b>	<b>Final Categories of Agent and Producer Messages Developed</b>	
<b>Step 4</b>	<b>Messages Sorted Into Final Categories (Agents and Producers)</b>	
<b>Step 5</b>	<b>Category-Messages Content Index Developed for Agents and Producers</b>	<b>Interview Summaries by Group and by Question</b>
<b>Step 6</b>	<b>Action/Situation-Outcome Tables Developed</b>	
<b>Step 7</b>	<b>Agent and Producer Summary Comparisons Developed</b>	
<b>Step 8</b>	<b>Agent and Producer Themes Extracted</b>	
<b>Step 9</b>	<b>Patterns Combining Agent and Producer Themes Developed</b>	

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Findings**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service cotton advisory committees as perceived by parish Extension agents and clientele. Focus group interviews were used to gather qualitative data in the form of video-and audio-taped comments of cotton advisory committee members and parish Extension agents. Open-ended questions used in the interviews were designed to lead to discussions from which perceptions were extracted about selected aspects of the cotton advisory committee system.

Six focus group interviews were conducted, four involving cotton advisory committee members, and two with LCES agents. Seventeen of the nineteen targeted parishes were represented by agents in the study, and twelve parishes were represented by members. Eighteen of the nineteen parishes were represented by either agents or members.

At the Alexandria location, one member group and one agent group were conducted. Nine agents attended representing the parishes of Avoyelles, Bossier, Caddo, Caldwell, Catahoula, Concordia, Franklin, Natchitoches, Ouachita, Rapides, and St. Landry. Seven members attended representing the parishes of Avoyelles, Pointe Coupee, Rapides, and St. Landry.

At the Monroe location, one member group was conducted. Five members attended representing the parishes of Caldwell, Morehouse, Ouachita, West Carroll, and Richland.

At the Winnsboro location, two member groups and one agent group were conducted. Ten agents attended representing the parishes of East Carroll, Franklin, Madison, Morehouse, Natchitoches, Richland, Tensas, and West Carroll. Nine members attended representing the parishes of Concordia, Franklin, and Tensas. Responses from the two member sessions conducted at Winnsboro were combined, due to the fact that no relevant new information was gained from the second session.

Demographic summaries are shown in Tables 2 and 3. The audio and video tapes were studied to extract individual messages, and to summarize, by question, participant comments.

As suggested by Patton (1990), the researcher extracted the messages and sorted them into naturally occurring categories. The categories were compared and final categories were determined. A content index was developed indicating the messages as sorted in the final categories.

Individual question summaries were done by the researcher for each question in each interview. The individual question summaries for cotton advisory committee members were compared and the individual question summaries for agents were compared. Summaries of each of these comparisons were written. Using the example set by Baker (1992), action/situation-outcome tables were developed from the individual question summaries. Agents' and members' perceptions were analyzed using the research model as a guide. Summaries of these perceptions were written.

**Table 2. Demographic characteristics of members**

<b>Demographic Summary of Member Participants</b>		
<b>Total number of participants</b>		<b>21</b>
<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>35 - 72</b>
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Years as a cotton producer</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>5 - 52</b>
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Ph.D.</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>Masters</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>Bachelors</b>	<b>8</b>
	<b>Some College</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>High School</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Years using Extension programs and information</b>	<b>1 to 9</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>10 to 20</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>over 20</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Acres of cotton produced in 1996</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>0 - 2400</b>
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>728</b>

**Table 3. Demographic characteristics of agents**

<b>Demographic Summary of Agent Participants</b>	
Total number of participants	19
Age (years)	Range 37 - 63 Mean 49
Present Extension position	County Agents 15 Area Agents 4
Years in present position	Range 1 - 32 Mean 13
Years in Extension	Range 8 - 35 Mean 21
Number of years working with cotton advisory committees	Range 1 - 34 Mean 13
Number of years working in Extension cotton programs	Range 1 - 34 Mean 14
Educational Level	1 Ph.D. Entomology 1 Ph.D. Horticulture 1 Ph.D. Plant Pathology 4 M.S. Extension Education 4 M.S. Animal Science 2 M.S. Agronomy 2 M.S. Life Sciences 1 M.S. Pest Management 1 M.S. Vocational Education 1 M.S. Agriculture 1 M.S. Agricultural Economics

The categorized content indexes and the individual question summary comparisons of the two groups were analyzed for themes. These themes represent the findings of this study. The themes were studied across groups for patterns in their perceptions. These patterns in the perceptions serve as the conclusions of the study. A summary of the perceptions of agents and members related to the research model is in the conclusions of the study.

#### Focus Group Interviews Question Summaries and Action/Situation - Outcomes

The moderator and researcher met following each interview and verified that the recorded tapes (video and audio) were of good quality. The session was then discussed considering content, problems (if any), and changes. After the first producer interview the questioning plan was discussed and it was decided that the order of the questions would be changed slightly. No other changes were required. It was agreed that flexibility existed to pursue comments that might add to the findings of the first meeting. Following the first agent interview it was decided to continue the same questioning plan.

#### Focus Group Interview with Cotton Advisory Committee Members

For the benefit of the member participants a short background statement was presented by the researcher. Participants were thanked for attending and the moderator and assistant moderator were introduced. The moderator explained that the purpose of the session was to obtain their perceptions as related to the LCES cotton advisory system and programming related to the cotton industry in Louisiana. They were informed that the information learned through these meetings would be used to guide future Extension programs.

Focus Group Interview - Members - Group 1 - Alexandria

- Question 1. Please introduce yourself and share your experience with the LSU Agricultural Center Extension Service relating to the cotton industry in your parish.
- (b) What has been your experience with Extension cotton advisory committees?
  - (c) Describe how your parish cotton advisory committee functions (number of members, meeting times, activities, etc.).

The opening discussion moved around the table with participants introducing themselves and expressing their initial thoughts. Everyone in the group knew each other, even though they represented several different parishes. One member of the group was a cotton producer and consultant. All stated that they did have a good working relationship with Extension and the local county agent.

The group, for the most part, did not have a good understanding of the advisory committee system and how it related to Extension programming. All did use Extension programs and information. Three of the participants stated that they had used Extension for over 20 years. Two participants said they had been members of their parish cotton advisory committees for over five years.

One participant stated that he worked with the county agent and the parish staff, but did see shortcomings in the parish advisory committee. He could only remember one meeting in the last two years. Most stated that the committee met once a year in a formal meeting, and informally in small groups and one-on-one throughout the year. One participant thought his parish committee met twice each year in a formal meeting. All said

they liked being a part of the advisory committee, but the majority of the group admitted they did not always attend the formal meetings.

The group could not give any specific activities in which the advisory committee had played a major role. One participant said "Extension is weak in cotton programs in the parish, the local staff can call on the Ag Center system but the county agent is more knowledgeable in other crops." They did cite several activities that Extension had initiated for the cotton industry in their parish such as on-farm demonstrations, field days, farm tours, and production meetings. Several members of the group had assisted Extension with these activities.

The need for more involvement by producers was expressed as an important aspect of program success. One participant stated "you have to get people out, biggest thing is to make people get involved."

Action/situation-outcomes for members in group 1 for question 1 are summarized in Table 4.

- Question 2. Discuss some major problem areas and needs of the cotton industry that can be addressed by the LCES.
- (b) Has your parish advisory committee worked on these needs and problems?
  - (c) What has been accomplished?

The consensus of the group was that Extension must move rapidly to insure that it remains on the cutting edge of technology. Members expressed concern about whether the Extension system can keep up with the pace of technology development. The group agreed that Extension could not continue to use the system that had been in place for 50 years, when things are changing from month to month. The ability of Extension to



transfer research information to the grower in a timely fashion was a strong concern of the participants.

Information transfer and speed of delivery were deemed the most important needs. The group agreed that Extension must develop a system to deliver research information as quickly as possible. The majority of the group expressed a strong desire to have information about new varieties and pesticides before the standard three years that govern release of research information from the research stations. All participants agreed that the information is "old news" by the time Extension starts to recommend new varieties and pesticides. They suggested publishing the research station findings every year, whether they are recommended or not. The majority felt that producers could decide if they wanted to use the information. One participant did not agree with this view. He said "...there is some justification for cautious recommendations by the university, ...the private sector will push stuff before people know how to handle it."

The group also expressed dissatisfaction with the timeliness of Extension bulletins. One participant said "...by the time I get them I have finished what I am going to do." The group as a whole valued Extension information, but felt that it was much too slow in reaching them. Use of the Internet was suggested as a possible future solution to speed delivery.

Other needs cited by the group included education of the public about the importance of agriculture, the need for the public to be aware of the agricultural industry's commitment to protect the environment, and production problems.

The group felt that Extension could use its resources to educate the general public about the importance of agriculture. Participants suggested that the 4-H program could be used to bring information about agriculture and environmental stewardship into the schools. They pointed to the Farm Bureau program "Ag In The Classroom" as an example of what could be done.

Everyone agreed that the agriculture sector was not getting enough positive exposure in the media. Participants felt that most media exposure was negative, such as reports of pesticide drift. They expressed the desire for more money to be spent educating the public. They felt that other states were doing a better job in this area.

Only one parish represented felt that the 4-H program was effectively carrying information about agriculture into the schools, but this was not as a result of the cotton advisory committee. The group felt that the cotton advisory committee could address some of these needs and concerns, but to do so a new structure would be needed. The participants agreed that a parish crop advisory committee would be more effective. All participants worked with more than one crop and expressed the desire to discuss all crops at one advisory committee meeting. They felt that the advisory committee should be pro active, but it is too difficult for farmers to meet and talk only about cotton. One participant stated "I think it is essential that advisory committees be pro active otherwise you are always reacting to some type of stimulus." A participant mentioned that his parish had one general overall committee.

The group did not want to eliminate advisory committees, but did think that they needed to be changed to an overall row crop committee that could look at the whole

parish situation each year. They agreed that the market situation would determine the agenda and discussion.

Action/situation-outcomes for question 2 for members in group 1 are summarized in Table 5.

- Question 3. As a result of your participation in the work of the advisory committee are there other Extension programs that you now know more about?
- (b) Are you or members of your family involved in other Extension programs such as: 4-H or Home Economics?

One participant was involved in the Extension soybean verification program. The group felt that a program like this would be good for cotton and other crops. One participant was involved with the 4-H program and his spouse with the home economics program. The group in general expressed support of all Extension programs but only a slight involvement in other program areas was detected (Table 6).

- Question 4. An important function of an advisory committee is to spread information. To what extent do you as a parish agricultural leader work to inform others of extension cotton education programs. Give examples.

The only examples of spreading information given by the participants were: working with the county agent to conduct on-farm demonstration, field days, and giving input for production meetings. The group cited no personal communication, or contacts spreading Extension generated information (Table 7).

- Question 5. Based on the factors, needs, and problems that have been identified during our discussion would you share your thoughts on improving the advisory committee system and Extension programming.

The group felt that Extension had lost some credibility. They cited examples of producers who do not use Extension recommendations. It was stated by several

members of the group that by the time Extension recommended a practice or variety the producers had already been using it for two years or more. They felt that perhaps the county agent, working with the parish advisory committee, could speed up the delivery system by passing on to LCES administration the need for getting information as soon as possible. They also felt that the committee might be used to promote use of the Internet in the future.

The group did not see the advisory committee system as being very important overall. They suggested that a written agenda would improve the meetings. They also suggested that the advisory committee process combine all crops grown in the parish and not focus on single commodities.

Extension programming was viewed as being valuable to production agriculture but too slow to respond. All but one member of the group even believed that Extension should use information that had been generated by private research to formulate recommendations and conduct educational programs in order to speed up the process.

Action/situation-outcomes for members in group 1 for question 5 are summarized in Table 8.

**Question 6.** What are your final thoughts on the current Extension cotton advisory system and programming process?

All expressed that the speed of information delivery is the most important aspect of Extension programming. All felt that Extension needs to be in the forefront bringing new technology to the cotton producer. They generally agreed that the committee did not need to meet too often, but members need to take a stronger position in directing the

county agent. One individual said that the private consultant had filled in where the county agent used to be. He stated "The consultant has filled a need that the county agent used to meet." Others agreed this was true for cotton, but not all crops.

The group as a whole expressed concern as to whether researchers and LCES administration were listening to county agents or advisory committees about the problems facing cotton producers. One participant summed up the general feeling of the group by saying "There is a whole system of consultants, companies, researchers, dealers, and farmers and the county agent needs to be a part of the system."

Action/situation-outcomes for members in group 1 for question 6 are summarized in Table 9.

Table 4. Members. Group 1. Question 1

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Advisory Committee Meeting	Formal and informal meetings Involvement of producers weak No specific parish activities Poor understanding of function
Extension Programming	Used Extension information Good working relationships Weakness in cotton education programs Every parish different
Producer Involvement	Enhances possibility of success
Role of Extension	Education Leadership Catalyst Agents with more technical expertise are needed

Table 5. Members, Group 1, Question 2

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Problems and Needs Identified	Information transfer Speed of information delivery Education of general public Production problems
Advisory Committee	Change structure Pro active
Accomplishments	Problem identification

Table 6. Members, Group 1, Question 3

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Extension programs	Primarily involved in agricultural program area Support for all Extension programs
Involvement of family members in other Extension programs	Limited involvement

Table 7. Members, Group 1, Question 4

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Visible results	Producers giving time to assist with Extension educational programs
Spreading information	On-farm demonstrations Hosting field days Input for production meetings

Table 8. Members, Group 1, Question 5

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Advisory Committee	Limited value in addressing producers' needs
Written agenda	Enhance participant satisfaction Provide direction
Include all crops in advisory committee	Increased involvement
Respond more rapidly to the producer's needs	Retain innovative producers as clients
More communication	Utilization of Internet Better coordination of programs Valuable and useful in technology transfer



Table 9. Members, Group 1, Question 6

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Members need to be pro active	Provide more input for county agent Ag Center System more aware of producer problems
Speed information delivery	More use of Extension information Better credibility Successful programs
Networking with consultants, agri-business, and research	Faster information delivery Better programs Increased audience Program support

Focus Group Interview - Members - Group 2 - Monroe

- Question 1. Please introduce yourself and share your experience with the LSU Agricultural Center Extension Service relating to the cotton industry in your parish.
- (b) What has been your experience with Extension cotton advisory committees?
  - (c) Describe how your parish cotton advisory committee functions (number of members, meeting times, activities, etc.).

The group represented five of the major cotton producing parishes in North Louisiana. All stated that they had a good working relationship with Extension and the local agents.

All participants had a good to excellent understanding of the advisory committee system and how it related to Extension programming. Three participants stated that their committee was a crop committee that covered all commodities produced in the parish, not just cotton. Four participants had been a member of their parish cotton/crop advisory committee for over five years. Three of the participants stated that they had used Extension for over 20 years.

All experiences with the advisory committees had been positive. One participant stated that the committee needed a more defined purpose. Most stated that committees met once a year in a formal meeting, and informally in small groups and one-on-one throughout the year. Most committees met for one to two hours during the day after the growing season. One participant stated that he wished the committee would meet at night.

Getting young farmers involved was a concern of all participants. One participant expressed the desire for the committee to have an agenda mailed out before the meeting.

The group gave several specific activities that the advisory committee as a whole, or individual members, had played a major role in. They included field demonstrations, field days, production meetings, and marketing meetings. The group agreed that the idea for, and planning of, most of these activities had started in the advisory committee meeting.

Action/situation-outcomes for members in group 2 for question 1 are summarized in Table 10.

Question 2. Discuss some major problem areas and needs of the cotton industry that can be addressed by the LCES.

(b) Has your parish advisory committee worked on these needs and problems?

(c) What has been accomplished?

The group identified the following problems and needs that could be addressed with Extension educational programs: proper irrigation, ultra narrow production, marketing, the economic aspect of farm management, cotton verification program, getting people to attend Extension educational meetings, pesticide record keeping, poly pipe disposal, biotechnology, and public education about pesticide use and the environment. They also identified several problems that Extension might assist with but which are not within the scope of educational programming: standardization of rules and regulations for pesticide safety and worker protection, the picking up of old pesticides every five years, and pesticide container disposal.

Educating the public about pesticide and environmental stewardship and marketing were deemed the most important problems and needs. Both irrigation and information on ultra narrow row cotton were considered to be very important. The group agreed that Extension educational programs were very good but sometimes slow to respond to the needs

of the producer. They also pointed out that Extension is "loaded down" with what needs to be done and that cotton production was only one of many programs. One participant said "There is a lot more to Extension than a once a year advisory committee meeting."

The group did not think that speed of information delivery was a problem. They did feel that Extension was hampered by not being able to recommend until they had three years of research information. All agreed that Extension educational meetings were very valuable. The Louisiana Cotton Forum was cited as being one of the best places to get useful information early in the year. One participant did state "People who will not come to the meetings are the ones who sit around and complain the most." They thought the Internet had good potential for future use, but access was a problem at the present time.

The group gave several examples where the parish advisory committees had worked on some of these needs. However, the perception expressed was that the advisory committee should act as a steering committee to get things going. Three participants gave examples of marketing meetings, that had been conducted, as results of advisory committee actions. All participants agreed that most of the on-farm demonstrations were the result of advisory committee recommendations. They also cited the pesticide pickup and container disposal programs as results of parish advisory committees.

All agreed that much had been accomplished through the parish advisory committee system. They thought that participation in Extension programs was the biggest problem. One participant stated "The people who need things the most never come, but I do not have an answer for this." Action/situation-outcomes for members in group 2 for question 2 are summarized in Table 11.

**Question 3.** As a result of your participation in the work of the advisory committee are there other Extension programs that you now know more about?

(b) Are you or members of your family involved in other Extension programs such as: 4-H or Home Economics?

The group was very aware of other Extension programs but not very involved in them. One participant had been a very active 4-H member but his children had not. Group members had the least involvement with the home economics program but felt that all Extension programs were valuable. All agreed that Extension cannot exist if it only serves agriculture. One participant stated "You can see this by looking at the farm bill. It could not be passed without the food stamp part. Agriculture is in the minority."

The group expressed the desire for Extension to use the other program areas to disseminate information about the importance of agriculture. All participants recognized the importance of the horticulture program in urban areas. The group in general expressed the feeling that the other programs expanded Extension to a lot of people outside the agricultural community.

They expressed the desire for Extension to focus on the modern needs of agriculture and all the general public. They agreed that all programs need to be constantly evaluated, not just agriculture, to keep them focused on current problems and needs.

Action/situation-outcomes for members in group 2 for question 3 are summarized in Table 12.

**Question 4.** An important function of an advisory committee is to spread information. To what extent do you as a parish agricultural leader work to inform others of extension cotton education programs. Give examples.

The participants did not view the advisory committee as a means to spread information. However, they did feel that individual members of the committee did a significant amount of work to inform others of Extension cotton education programs. They used the examples of on-farm demonstrations, field days, and assisting the county agent with production meetings. They also felt that as individual members they spread a significant amount of information through personal communications to neighbors and other farmers in their community (Table 13).

Question 5. Based on the factors, needs, and problems that have been identified during our discussion would you share your thoughts on improving the advisory committee system and Extension programming.

The group agreed that the advisory committee should cover all crops and meet more than one time each year. They expressed the desire to be more active with the advisory committee system. The need to involve new and young farmers was expressed as a primary concern. They viewed the parish advisory committee as being a very important part of the Extension system. They also suggested that a written agenda would improve the meetings.

They felt that Extension programming should concentrate on marketing and farm management. One participant suggested that all people should be required to go through an Extension financial management program before they are loaned money to farm for the first time. The group agreed that use of the Internet to deliver information held good potential for the future. They viewed Extension programming as being valuable to the cotton industry and production agriculture as a whole. Action/situation-outcomes are summarized for this question in Table 14.

Question 6. What are your final thoughts on the current Extension cotton advisory system and programming process?

The group agreed that the advisory committee system was needed and gave producers an opportunity to direct Extension programming. They pointed to marketing, reducing production costs, and public education as current areas that Extension programming should be addressing. Strong support was voiced for the Ag Leadership Program, as a valuable part of Extension programming. This program is directed to developing the leadership skills of agricultural clientele, with special attention given to young producers and potential leaders.

All felt that Extension needed to be in the forefront of bringing new technology to producers. The involvement of producers in Extension education programs, and young producers in advisory committee meetings were expressed as the two weakest points in the present process. None in the group had any suggestions as to how to accomplish this. Action/situation-outcomes are summarized in Table 15.

Table 10. Members, Group 2, Question 1

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Advisory committee meeting	Positive experience Formal and informal meetings Comprehended purpose and function
Role of Extension	To coordinate
Young farmer involvement	Key to continued success
Extension programming	Good working relationships Information utilized

Table 11. Members, Group 2, Question 2

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Problems and needs identified	Education of general public Environmental stewardship Marketing and farm management Producer involvement Production practices Pesticide record keeping Bio-technology information
Advisory committee	Problems worked on Much has been accomplished
Accomplishments	Marketing meetings Demonstrations Pesticide pick up Pesticide container disposal Poor attendance
Extension staff	Loaded down Many things to many people
Speed of information delivery	Hampered by waiting for three years of research Use of Internet Timely production meetings



Table 12. Members, Group 2, Question 3

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Extension programs	Primarily involved in agricultural program area Recognized the importance of other program areas
Involvement of family members in other Extension programs	Limited involvement
Program evaluation	Keep Extension focused on current problems and needs

Table 13. Members, Group 2, Question 4

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Members spreading information	Demonstrations On-farm field days Production meetings Personal communications
Visible results	Committee member involvement

Table 14. Members, Group 2, Question 5

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Advisory committee/Extension programming	Valuable to state cotton industry and agriculture
Written agenda	Participant satisfaction Provide direction
Use of Internet	Faster communication Better program coordination
Involvement of young producers	Better understanding of Extension programs Perpetuation of committee

Table 15. Members, Group 2, Question 6

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Ag Leadership Program	Increased support of Extension
Advisory committee meeting	Time well spent
Young Producer Involvement	Sustain Extension programs

Focus Group Interview - Members - Group 3 - Winnsboro

Question 1. Please introduce yourself and share your experience with the LSU Agricultural Center Extension Service relating to the cotton industry in your parish.

(b) What has been your experience with Extension cotton advisory committees?

(c) Describe how your parish cotton advisory committee functions (number of members, meeting times, activities, etc.).

The group represented three of the major cotton producing parishes in North Louisiana, including the largest parish in terms of acreage and number of producers. All stated that they had a good working relationship with Extension and the local agents. Two were agricultural consultants as well as producers.

The group had a mixed understanding of the advisory committee system and how it related to Extension programming. Four members seemed to have been actively involved with their parish advisory committee. The remaining members could only relate involvement as attendance. All of the group did use Extension programs and information. Seven of the participants stated that they had used Extension for over 20 years. Eight stated they had been a member of their parish cotton advisory committee for over five years. All stated that their committee met annually. Four stated that their committee covered all crops, not just cotton.

All experiences of the advisory committee with Extension education programs had been positive except for the recent boll weevil eradication program. All participants thought that Extension had been biased in its approach to developing educational materials and programs for this program, and had taken only one side of the issue.

Four participants gave specific activities that their parish advisory committee had initiated. Activities cited included production meetings, on-farm demonstrations, and field days. The group felt that Extension was needed now more than ever to provide intensive help to the cotton producer. One participant said "Extension has a challenge to keep us in the cotton business, and help us make good decisions." The group felt that the advisory committee was a tool that Extension could use to accomplish this.

Action/situation-outcomes are summarized in Table 16 for this group and question.

- Question 2. Discuss some major problem areas and needs of the cotton industry that can be addressed by the LCES.
- (b) Has your parish advisory committee worked on these needs and problems?
  - (c) What has been accomplished?

The group cited a lengthy list of problems and needs. They included achieving profit, technology conservation, pest management, crop rotation, education of landlords concerning production costs and returns, boll weevil eradication, disposal of tires, education on proper fertility and liming, drainage, subsoiling information, pesticide pickup, faster delivery of information, controlling production costs, and biased information from consultants. Out of this lengthy list, four problems and needs were the center of most of the discussion: achieving profit, pest management, speed of information delivery, and biased information from consultants and agribusiness.

Included in achieving profit were record keeping, preparing budgets, financial planning, marketing, and reducing production costs. The group agreed that Extension should provide an economic analysis of all new technology as it comes to the field. One participant stated "Extension has too many production people and not enough economists."

The cost of new pesticides was deemed a major problem. The group expressed the concern that these costs continue to rise but the price of cotton remains stable. Concern was expressed about the resistance of insect populations to pesticides and the need to maintain the effectiveness of new insecticides for as long as possible. The group generally agreed that Extension should increase efforts to educate the producer about integrated pest management practices. Consultants were viewed as a part of the pest management problem by a majority of the group. Participants agreed, with the exception of one, that consultants were not giving enough attention to integrated pest management techniques. The group felt that there were many good qualified consultants, but that as a whole they were not utilizing Extension. They felt that many consultants went directly to research and agri-business for their information, and that the information from the agribusiness sector was biased. The two consultants present in this group felt that they were working with Extension and using integrated pest management practices, but agreed that this was not always the case.

Speed of delivery of information was considered to be a problem and in need of improvement. The group stated that Extension publications were late in coming out. The variety recommendations were used as an example of a publication that arrived after the varieties had been ordered. The Internet was suggested as one possible way to speed delivery when access becomes available. At present it was viewed as being difficult to use in rural areas. Putting information on the Data Transmission Network (DTN), a commercial communications system that is widely used by Louisiana farmers to access crop, market, and weather updates, was suggested. Increased use of the mass media was also suggested. One participant suggested that Extension prepare a spiral bound book that could be updated each

year instead of the individual bulletins. He felt this would allow information to be sent without waiting for it to be printed in a bulletin. Another participant suggested that if funding was a problem, advertising could be sold to appear in the books. This could generate additional revenue to print the material.

The group stated that many of these problems and needs had been discussed at parish advisory committee meetings. The consensus was that some of the needs had been addressed by the advisory committee but not all of them. The group cited demonstrations, computer workshops, and marketing meetings that had been done as a result of advisory committee input. Many of the participants had assisted with these activities.

Action/situation-outcomes are summarized for this question and group in Table 17.

Question 3. As a result of your participation in the work of the advisory committee are there other Extension programs that you now know more about?

(b) Are you or members of your family involved in other Extension programs such as: 4-H or Home Economics?

Several of the participants had been involved in other Extension programs. All felt that information from the home economics program was very valuable for families. The 4-H program was viewed as being an excellent educational program for youth. Two participants mentioned environmental programs as being a very important part of Extension's information base.

The participants expressed the desire for the 4-H and home economics programs to be used to convey to the public the importance of agriculture. One participant suggested that Extension start a program for 4-H similar to the Farm Bureau sponsored Ag in the Classroom program (Table 18).

**Question 4.** An important function of an advisory committee is to spread information. To what extent do you as a parish agricultural leader work to inform others of extension cotton education programs. Give examples.

Several participants felt that the advisory committee could do more. They pointed to on-farm demonstrations, and field days as activities that were initiated and followed up by advisory committee members. They felt that even though these activities were initiated by advisory committee action and very educational, a major problem existed in getting producers to attend. The group cited no personal communication, or contacts spreading Extension information. They felt that this was the job of the county agent (Table 19).

**Question 5.** Based on the factors, needs, and problems that have been identified during our discussion would you share your thoughts on improving the advisory committee system and Extension programming.

The group had several suggestions for improving advisory committees and Extension programming. They felt that a list of parish advisory committee members should be mailed to all cotton producers. This could open more communication between producers and Extension through the advisory committee system. One participant stated, "Then if you have a problem you want addressed, but you are not on the committee, you know who to talk to."

All agreed that more participation by young farmers was critical. The group recommended that a closer working relationship between Extension and research should be developed. They also recommended that Extension develop better communications with producers, consultants, and research personnel. The general feeling was that agents did not have open communications with research personnel, producers and consultants concerning



advisory committee activities. Action/situation-outcomes are summarized for this group and question in Table 20.

Question 6. What are your final thoughts on the current Extension cotton advisory system and programming process?

All agreed that the cotton advisory committee system was needed. The group stressed that Extension should remain neutral when delivering educational information. The boll weevil eradication program was used as the example of Extension not being neutral. One participant stated "That was a sorry program, because it was biased."

The group felt that Extension programming should look at all crops jointly and not separate out each commodity. They agreed that most producers farm several crops, and change from year to year. All agreed that Extension should work closely with research to develop programs that meet the needs of producers. The group placed a high value on three years of research before releasing information.

The group consensus was that involvement of young producers was critical to both Extension and the cotton industry. They stated that low attendance of producers at Extension educational activities was a big problem, with no answer (Table 21).

Table 16. Members, Group 3, Question 1

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Extension experience	Positive
Advisory committee experience	Good for the cotton industry
Involvement	Some members very active

Table 17. Members. Group 3. Question 2

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Problems identified	Biased information from consultants and agri-business representatives Speed of information delivery
Needs identified	Profitability Better integrated pest management
Advisory committee	Provides input Demonstrations, workshops, marketing meetings

Table 18. Members, Group 3, Question 3

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Other Extension programs	Aware of and some involvement Very supportive Recognize the importance Public education
Involvement of family members	Substantial

Table 19. Members, Group 3, Question 4

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Spreading information	No personal contacts On-farm demonstrations Hosting field days
Visible results	Committee member involvement
Poor attendance at Extension sponsored activities	Problem in spreading information

Table 20. Members, Group 3, Question 5

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Public list of members	Improved communication
Communication skills	Improved programs Better working relationships Better program coordination

Table 21. Members, Group 3, Question 6

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Unbiased information	Strong educational programs Better producer support Improved credibility
Meeting producer needs	Networking with research All crop advisory committees Successful programs

### Comparison of Summaries of Member Focus Group Interviews

Question 1. Please introduce yourself and share your experience with the LSU Agricultural Center Extension Service relating to the cotton industry in your parish.

(b) What has been your experience with Extension cotton advisory committees?

(c) Describe how your parish cotton advisory committee functions (number of members, meeting times, activities, etc.).

All three groups agreed that they had a good working relationship with Extension and the parish agents. All groups had members who had used Extension and been members of the advisory committee system for several years.

Group 1 for the most part did not have a good understanding of the advisory committee system and how it related to Extension programming. Group 2 had a good to excellent understanding, and Group 3 had a mixed understanding. Generally the groups agreed that their committee met once each year formally and informally throughout the year. Several parish representatives stated that their advisory committee included all crops, not just cotton. None of the participants knew how many members were on their committees, but the estimated average was five.

Group 1 could not give any specific activities in which the advisory committee had played a major role. Groups 2 and 3 listed several specific activities. All three groups agreed that the biggest problem facing Extension programming was that of getting producers to attend educational meetings, and become involved in Extension programs.

Question 2. Discuss some major problem areas and needs of the cotton industry that can be addressed by the LCES.

(b) Has your parish advisory committee worked on these needs and problems?

(c) What has been accomplished?

The problems and needs identified by the groups did overlap in many areas, but the ones deemed most important varied by group. Group 1 listed information transfer and the speed of information delivery as the most important needs. Group 2 felt that educating the public about pesticide and environmental stewardship, and marketing were the most important needs. Group 3 centered most of its discussion around the problems and needs of achieving profit, pest management, speed of information delivery, and biased information from consultants and agri-business.

Both Groups 1 and 3 felt that the speed of delivering information to the producer was a problem that needed to be addressed by Extension. Group 2 did not see this as a problem. All agreed that information transfer needed to keep up with technology. Groups 1 and 2 felt that Extension was hampered by having to wait for three years of research results before making recommendations. However, the majority of Group 3 participants felt that the three years was necessary to insure valid recommendations.

All groups listed the need for educating the public about pesticide usage and environmental stewardship, but Group 2 placed more emphasis on this. Group 2 centered much of its discussion around the need for more marketing information. Group 3 discussed in detail the need for achieving profit. Marketing was also a significant part of this discussion.

Pest management was discussed as a problem by all groups. Group 3 felt that it was a major part of achieving profit, but also expressed that it was not as important as marketing and farm management. All groups agreed that Extension could address this need through advisory committee work and programming.

Biased information from consultants and agribusiness was discussed the most by Groups 1 and 3. Group 1 had mixed feelings about this problem, while Group 3 felt strongly that this was a big problem. Group 2 briefly discussed this issue but did not see a problem in this area.

Group 1 could not relate any advisory committee activities addressing these needs. Groups 2 and 3 did give several specific examples of advisory committee work that addressed some of the needs. They also felt that significant accomplishments had been achieved in solving some problems and meeting these needs.

Question 3. As a result of your participation in the work of the advisory committee are there other Extension programs that you now know more about?  
(b) Are you or members of your family involved in other Extension programs such as: 4-H or Home Economics?

Participants in all three groups were primarily involved in the agricultural program area. Group 3 participants were more involved than those in Groups 1 and 2. All three groups expressed support for all Extension programs.

Groups 1 and 2 expressed only limited involvement by other family members. Group 3 participants had substantial involvement by other family members in 4-H and home economics programs. All three groups expressed the desire that the 4-H and home economics programs be used to convey to the public the importance of agriculture.

Question 4. An important function of an advisory committee is to spread information. To what extent do you as a parish agricultural leader work to inform others of extension cotton education programs. Give examples.

Group 1 gave no examples of spreading information or informing others of Extension cotton education programs. They did say that the local agents conducted



demonstrations and they assisted. Group 2 did not view the advisory committee as a means to spread information. They did feel that individual members spread a significant amount of information through personal communications and assisting the county agent with programs. Group 3 pointed to on-farm demonstrations, and field days as activities that were initiated by the advisory committee and followed up by members. Group 3 cited no personal communication, or contacts used to spread Extension information. They viewed this as the county agent's job.

**Question 5.** Based on the factors, needs, and problems that have been identified during our discussion would you share your thoughts on improving the advisory committee system and Extension programming.

All groups agreed that the advisory committee needed a written agenda mailed out prior to the meetings. All groups also agreed that the parish advisory committee should include all crops not just cotton. Groups 2 and 3 emphasized the need for involvement of new and young producers.

Group 1 felt that the advisory committee system was of limited value in addressing producers' needs. Groups 2 and 3 felt that it was very valuable.

All groups viewed Extension programming as being valuable. However, Group 1 felt that Extension was too slow to respond to the needs of the cotton industry and production agriculture in general. Group 2 agreed that Extension should work on improving speed of delivery. Group 2 also felt that Extension programming should concentrate on marketing and farm management. Group 3 recommended a closer working relationship and strong communication between Extension and research.

Question 6. What are your final thoughts on the current Extension cotton advisory system and programming process?

The final thoughts of the groups centered around speed of information delivery, networking to develop programs, involving young producers, and meeting the producer's needs. Group 3 strongly recommended that Extension deliver only unbiased educational programs. However, Group 1 felt that Extension could speed information delivery by using research generated in the private sector.

All groups agreed that Extension programs were valuable to the cotton industry in Louisiana. Group 2 gave the Ag Leadership Program as an example of a program that was highly valued. The desire for Extension to be on the forefront of new technology was expressed by all groups.. The groups also agreed that getting producers involved was the key to increased success of Extension programs.

#### Focus Group Interview - Agents - Group 1 - Alexandria

Question 1. Reflect on and express the things that stick out in your mind about advisory committees and the programming process related to the cotton industry.

- (b) Describe the membership of your cotton advisory committee.
- (c) Describe the process that you use to select members.
- (d) Describe how your parish cotton advisory committee functions (number of members, meetings times, activities, etc.).

The opening discussion moved around the table with each agent in turn discussing their cotton advisory committee and Extension programming. The group members had a wide range of experience from 8 to 31 years in Extension and from 5 to 20 years working with cotton programs. Agents represented parishes that ranged from less than 5,000 acres

of cotton to over 100,000 acres. Two participants were area agents who covered more than one parish.

Two agents stated that their committees covered all crops, not just cotton. They felt strongly that this was the best approach. Others in the group agreed that most producers were involved in several commodities and this might be the best approach.

Most committees included both black and white, small and large producers. One agent stated that his committee also included hispanic farmers. However, one agent felt that it was difficult to communicate to minority producers the purpose of an advisory committee. Two agents reported women serving on the committees. The majority of the parish advisory committees also included agri-business personnel, community leaders, gin personnel, aerial applicators, and USDA agency personnel on the committees. Two parishes also included consultants as a part of the committee. One agent included research personnel and the Extension cotton specialist as a part of the committee. One parish committee included locally elected political leaders. All agreed that the majority of the committee members were producers.

All agreed that they selected persons who would serve and tried to have representation from all areas of the parish. The area agents expressed that they worked with the parish agents in selecting committee members and conducting meetings. All used some type of rotation, but generally agreed that some members did serve for several years. Committee size varied from as few as 4 members to as many as 30. Most committees met once each year in a formal meeting and one-on-one with members throughout the year. Two agents reported that they met the committee only once every four years as called for in the

Extension programming cycle. The committees usually met after the crop season in the fall. The time of day varied.

The agents viewed the committees as a source of advice and support for developing programs. They listed on-farm demonstrations, input for production meetings, and newsletters as activities that the committee had assisted with or initiated. They felt that the committee legitimized Extension programs.

Action/situation-outcomes for agents in group 1 for question 1 are summarized in Table 22.

- Question 2. Name the major problem areas and needs of the cotton industry that can be addressed by the LCES.
- (b) Has your parish cotton advisory committee worked on these needs?
  - (c) What has been accomplished or why have the needs not been worked on?

The following needs were identified: marketing, drainage, farm management, insect resistance to pesticides, pest management information, increased speed of information delivery, handbook for cotton production, and better working relationships among Extension, research, agri-business and consultants. The group felt that all of these could be addressed by LCES through programming or administration. Many of these needs and problems had been identified in advisory committee meetings. The consensus was that these needs could be worked on by LCES but the committee often discussed things that Extension had no control over.

Marketing, farm management and economic information was thought to be very important. The group agreed that there was a strong need for area cotton marketing specialists.

All agreed that Extension needed to do the best job possible to get the information to producers in a timely fashion. They felt that this was a need in all areas; pest management, production recommendations, and farm management. One agent said, "Producers are booking seed before the variety recommendations are even printed." Another agent said, "There is no need to print a nice slick bulletin on cotton varieties that is just going to be thrown away. Put it on plain paper and let us reproduce it". The group agreed that too much time and money was being spent on producing "fancy publications." The reduction in postage was also cited as a limiting factor in delivering information to the producers.

The Internet was discussed as a possible solution to the problem. Several agents had strong reservations about putting information on the Internet. They felt that the access to information by consultants and agribusiness on the Internet could, in effect, cut out the local Extension agent as a source of information. Two agents took the opposing view and expressed the desire to deliver the information as fast as possible, any way possible.

Some of the needs and problems identified had been discussed at parish advisory committee meetings. The agents cited demonstrations and educational programs that had been initiated by the advisory committees as examples of work that had occurred addressing them. The consensus was that a lot of work still needed to be done in these problem areas. All agreed that to address these problems and programming needs, Extension administration

should be involved. Action/situation-outcomes for agents in group 1 for question 2 are summarized in Table 23.

**Question 3.** As a result of their participation in the work of the advisory committee to what extent do you feel members gained knowledge of other extension programs?

One agent stated "Most members have family involved in other extension programs such as 4-H, livestock, or the spouse may be part of the home economics program." The group agreed that most members knew about other programs but may not be involved.

There was a lengthy discussion about parish advisory councils that included representatives from all programs. The group was somewhat split in their opinion as to the value of such councils. One agent felt that people on the advisory council would have appreciation and knowledge of other extension programs, and this would generate more interest in all program areas. Another agent felt that advisory councils were a waste of time. He stated "We do not have a problem getting members to commodity committee meetings but we do for the overall committee." The majority of the group agreed that the overall advisory committee should meet only once every three or four years and that it had little to do with the cotton advisory committee. Actions/situations-outcomes are summarized in Table 24 for this group and question.

**Question 4.** An important function of an advisory committee is to spread information. To what extent does your parish advisory committee work to inform clientele of extension cotton education programs. Give examples.

The majority of the agents agreed that committee members spread a significant amount of information through hosting farm tours, cooperating with on-farm demonstrations, and assisting with educational tours. They also felt that committee

members are spread out in the different communities, and other farmers are watching Extension programs at work on these farms. An example given of this was a pest management demonstration, with neighbors inquiring about what and why certain practices are being implemented.

It was also pointed out that producers who had gone through the Ag Leadership Program were usually looked on as community leaders and were valuable in spreading information. Agribusiness members were also cited as being valuable assets in spreading information.

One agent did not agree with this view. He felt that the role of the advisory committee was not to spread information. He stated "An advisory committee, in theory, would be very good in promoting educational programs, but in reality this does not happen."

The majority of the agents agreed that committee members do help spread information through personal contacts, and assisting with demonstrations and programs. However, they felt that many of the members were not prepared to actually conduct programs or serve as a speaker for educational programs. They also agreed that many members did not want to be "up in front of the crowd." Action/situation-outcomes for this agent group are summarized in Table 25 for question 4.

**Question 5.** Based on the factors, needs and problem areas that have been identified during our discussion share your thoughts on improving the advisory committee system and Extension programming.

Several agents said there is a lot of variation in the quality of different advisory committee meetings. There is variation from year to year. All agents agreed that sometimes

the meeting would go very smoothly with a lot of good input; other times it would be dominated by one or two individuals, or input would be very limited.

One agent stated that the advisory committee process was on-going, and that the annual meeting was only a formality. Everyone generally agreed with this statement, and also felt the daily one-on-one contact was much more important to program success. Another agent stated "The advisory committee members are the backbone of support for Extension, not the formal meeting."

Some agents saw little value in having a parish cotton advisory committee. Others felt that the committee provided input for program direction and legitimation for Extension programs. All agreed that one-on-one contact was more valuable to developing Extension programming than advisory committees. The following suggestions were given for improving cotton advisory committees and programming:

1. Have a written agenda for meetings
2. Meetings should be informal, with free flowing discussion
3. Develop working relationships with members
4. Address real and immediate needs with programming
5. Cover all crops, not just cotton, in committee meetings
6. Have small group community advisory meetings

The group was split in its feelings about the value of advisory committees in program planning. Two agents expressed the desire to abolish parish cotton advisory committees completely. Others felt they were of some value. All agreed that the committee structure needed to be changed if it is to be a vital part of Extension programming. They



felt that it should include all crops, not just cotton. They also felt that meeting in small community groups or across parish lines might improve the process. The group generally agreed that Extension programming should strive to meet the real and immediate needs of the cotton industry as identified through committee meetings and one-on-one contacts.

Action/situation-outcomes for agents in group 1 for question 5 are summarized in Table 26.

**Question 6.** What are your final thoughts on the current Extension cotton advisory system and programming process after these discussions?

The group did not view advisory committees as being very important in keeping Extension programming on track for meeting the needs of the cotton industry. Two agents expressed the sentiment that consultants and agribusiness personnel were major competition for Extension agents in delivering information to the producer. The rest of the group did not concur. Four agents said that they had no problem working with consultants and agribusiness personnel. It was pointed out that Extension needed to work with all clientele and provide them with information.

The majority of the group felt that it was essential for Extension agents to be as well trained as possible. One agent said "You cannot have a background in horticulture or animal science, and wake up one day and find yourself a crop specialist." All in the group agreed that there needed to be more training for young agents for some type of transition into crop work assignments.

Agents expressed concern about trying to be everything to everybody in the parish. One agent stated "You cannot be a specialist in every commodity." He went on to say that

now may be the time for multi-parish agents with specialized training in specific commodities.

All in the group agreed that speed of information delivery was critical to maintaining credibility. One agent said "When farmers ask for judgement calls on crops and we need help from a specialist quickly, calling Knapp Hall (where the majority of the state specialists are located), may take a week to get an answer, we need specialists in the field." The group consensus was that area specialists, particularly in farm management and weed control, were needed. They felt this would provide support for agents, and the entomologist and cotton specialist who are already located in the field. The group generally agreed that area specialists need to be in the field to keep Extension in business. Action/situation-outcomes are summarized in Table 27 for this agent group and question 6.

Table 22. Agents, Group 1, Question 1

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Advisory Committee/Programming	Formal and informal meetings Wide representation Producer involvement
Legitimation	Program acceptance Enhance program success
Producer participation	Those who will serve Multi-years by many members
Committee membership	Majority producers

Table 23. Agents, Group 1, Question 2

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Problems/Needs Identified	Marketing/Farm management Pest management Timely information Working relationships Drainage Area cotton specialists Pesticide resistance
Extension programming	Capable of addressing Successful programs
Internet	Would speed up information delivery Enhance consultant's position Reduce need for local agent
Format change for Extension publications	Speed delivery Reduce time and cost
Administrative involvement	Solve postage dilemma Provide area specialists Increase speed of information delivery

Table 24. Agents, Group 1, Question 3

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Knowledge of other Extension programs	Awareness Slight involvement
Advisory councils	Generate more interest Meet too often Low attendance

Table 25. Agents, Groups 1, Question 4

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Spreading information	Agri-business members assist Personal communication Set example Assist with programs
Program speakers	Not appealing to many committee members
Ag Leadership Program	Identifies community leaders Valuable in spreading information Increased exposure for Extension programs

Table 26. Agents, Group 1, Question 5

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Written agenda	Gives meeting direction More producer involvement Better communication
Relationships	Stronger producer input Successful programs
Informal, with free flowing discussion	Valid information Better member participation Identification of true needs and problems
Community meetings	Better Extension programs Increased participation
Cover all crops	Better utilization of time More flexible structure More producer participation
Address real and immediate needs	Producer satisfaction Extension recognized as leader Programs of more value to producer

Table 27. Agents, Group 1, Question 6

<b>ACTION/SITUATION</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
Advisory Committees	Little importance Does not meet Extension programming needs Does not meet needs of cotton industry
Extension staff development	Meet the needs of all clientele Better prepared agents Keep Extension in business Improved programming Multi-parish specialized agents Area specialists

Focus Group Interview - Agents - Group 2 - Winnsboro

- Question 1. Reflect on and express the things that stick out in your mind about advisory committees and the programming process related to the cotton industry.
- (b) Describe the membership of your cotton advisory committee.
  - (c) Describe the process that you use to select members.
  - (d) Describe how your parish cotton advisory committee functions (number of members, meetings times, activities, etc.).

This agent group was composed of two area agents and eight county agents. They represented all of the largest cotton producing parishes in Northeast Louisiana. The group had a range of experience from 15 to 35 years in Extension, and from 1 to 34 years working with cotton education programs. The opening discussion moved around the table with agents discussing in turn their cotton advisory committees and Extension programming.

Five agents stated that their committees covered all crops, not just cotton. They felt strongly that this was the best approach. Justification for this was the fact that most farmers produce more than one crop, and in some cases cotton is not the number one commodity.

Most committees included both black and white, small and large producers. One parish reported female producers. In addition to farmers, other committee members came from elected officials, cotton gins, agribusiness and USDA agencies. All agreed that the majority of the committee members were producers.

All agreed that they selected persons who would serve and tried to have representation from all areas of the parish. The area agents expressed that they worked with the parish agents in selecting committee members and conducting meetings. All used some type of rotation, usually two or three years. The group generally agreed that some members



did serve for several years. One agent said "...if they want to stay on the committee, we will keep them." Another agent said that they tried to add young farmers when possible.

Committee size varied from as few as 5 members to as many as 25. Most committees met once each year in a formal meeting and one-on-one with members throughout the year. The committees usually met after the crop season in the fall. The time of day varied. One agent stated "You have to avoid hunting season."

The agents viewed the committees as a strong source of advice and problem identification. They felt the committees were very helpful in determining program direction. They listed on-farm demonstrations, input for production meetings, assistance with field tours, and providing information on crop situations as activities that the committee had assisted with or initiated. The overall feeling of the group was that advisory committees strengthened Extension programs (Table 28).

Question 2. Name the major problem areas and needs of the cotton industry that can be addressed by the LCES.

- (b) Has your parish cotton advisory committee worked on these needs?
- (c) What has been accomplished or why have the needs not been worked on?

The following problem areas and needs were identified as ones that the LCES should be addressing: marketing, bio-technology, irrigation, pest management, boll weevil eradication, and flooding. Of this list, the group consensus was that insect pest management and marketing were the most important. The group also agreed that advisory committees would often come up with long lists of needs that had to be prioritized to determine what LCES could address.

The group did not feel that the advisory committees had actually worked on these needs other than assisting with demonstrations and giving input for production meetings. One agent strongly felt that advisory committees were for giving advice only. He felt that the professional agent must develop the programs. He stated "The advisory committee is just going to identify problems." Some members of the group agreed with him, but many did not. They felt that committee members were actively involved in assisting with program implementation.

The only advisory committee accomplishments given by this group of agents were problem identification, and giving direction for programming. The general consensus of the group was that the agent had to develop programs and initiate action (Table 29).

Question 3. As a result of their participation in the work of the advisory committee to what extent do you feel members gained knowledge of other extension programs?

The consensus of the group was that by being a part of the advisory committee, members had a better understanding of all Extension programs. One agent stated "Some of them did not even know about things like home grounds before they became members of the advisory committee."

All agreed that many times advisory committee discussions would carry over into other program areas. Several agents pointed to the overall agriculture committee concept as a means of conveying to producers the broad scope of Extension programs. All agreed that advisory committee members gain a better appreciation of what an Extension agent has to do in addition to cotton programs. Action/situation-outcomes for agents in group 2, question 3 are summarized in Table 30.

**Question 4.** An important function of an advisory committee is to spread information. To what extent does your parish advisory committee work to inform clientele of extension cotton education programs. Give examples.

The majority of this agent group did not see the spread of information as a major function of advisory committees. They saw the committee primarily as a tool for problem identification and program direction. All agreed that members did assist in spreading information about upcoming meetings. One agent felt that his committee did do some work in the area. Another agent stated "...that is not what they are for, they cannot accomplish anything." He felt their sole function was to advise.

Result demonstrations were mentioned as an indirect means of spreading Extension information through advisory committee members. However, overall the group did not view this as an important part of advisory committee work (Table 31).

**Question 5.** Based on the factors, needs and problem areas that have been identified during our discussion share your thoughts on improving the advisory committee system and Extension programming.

The group agreed that the advisory committee is the backbone of identifying problems and needs for Extension. Advisory committees were considered to be very important in providing input for developing educational objectives for Extension programs.

One agent felt that it was very important that advisory committee members understand the structure of the LSU Ag Center and how Extension and advisory committees fit into it. The group also expressed the need for educating members on the relationship between Extension and other federal and state agencies. The agents believed there was a lot of confusion among clientele about the functions, administration and relationships among the various agricultural agencies.

One agent suggested that having an outside observer to evaluate the advisory committee meeting might be useful. It was suggested that a state specialist or researcher might be called in to perform this task. The majority of the group was strongly opposed to this idea. They felt that researchers and specialists would not be aware of parish situations and would only be knowledgeable in a specific subject matter area. They saw this as a real problem and visualized committee members largely interacting with the visiting researchers or specialists rather than with the agent or one another. The group did agree that a programming specialist might be of value in evaluating the committee meetings.

The group also had the following suggestions for improving Extension programming and advisory committees: (a) make information timely, (b) speed up information delivery, (c) improve mass media usage, (d) educate members on the purpose of advisory committees, and (e) change Extension structure and programming to meet the current needs. All agreed that advisory committees were needed to legitimize Extension programs and provide direction.

Action/situation-outcomes for agents in group 2 for question 5 are summarized in Table 32.

Question 6. What are your final thoughts on the current Extension cotton advisory system and programming process after these discussions?

Group consensus was that a lot of variation existed in advisory committees, and some variation in programming from parish to parish. There was also consensus that advisory committees were a necessary part of Extension programming. One agent stated "...hopefully our advisory committee at the local level does represent what is there." The

group felt that advisory committees may be even more important in the future to insure that Extension programming is meeting the needs of the clientele.

Several agents expressed the sentiment that consultants and agribusiness personnel were major competition for Extension agents in delivering information to the producer. One agent stated "We are on the front line, we have 50 private industry people in the parish every day to push a product or sell a service to the farmer." Four members of the group strongly disagreed. One of these four said "Our parish is not like that. We consider the consultants and agribusiness personnel to be a part of our clientele and Extension programming."

The group felt that Extension in Louisiana was behind in providing information over the Internet and in the use of mass media. They cited the example of mass media information that comes into Northeast Louisiana from the Mississippi Extension Service. They felt that today's farmers were much better educated and prepared to take advantage of information delivered by these methods.

The dominant theme in the closing comments was that advisory committees are important in programming, but the Extension agent must be the educator (Table 33).

Table 28. Agents. Group 2. Question 1

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Advisory Committee	Advice and problem identification Good producer involvement Enhances Extension programming
Committee membership	Majority producers

Table 29. Agents, Group 2, Question 2

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Problems/Needs identified	Marketing Pest management Boll weevil eradication Flooding Irrigation Bio-technology
Advisory committee work	Problem identification Programs initiated by agent Agent develops programs Program planning input Program direction Committee members assist with implementation
Accomplishments	Successful programs Meeting producer needs

Table 30. Agents, Group 2, Question 3

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Advisory committee participation	Increased awareness of other Extension programs Appreciation of agent's responsibilities

Table 31. Agents, Group 2, Question 4

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Spreading information	Ineffective Marginal assistance Not a major function

Table 32. Agents. Group 2. Question 5

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Change Extension structure and programs	Meet current needs of cotton industry Deliver timely information Increased use of mass media Better programs
Educate committee members	Better understanding of Extension's role Better input at committee meetings
Outside observer at advisory committee meetings	Disruption of meeting Valuable for evaluation



Table 33. Agents. Group 2. Question 6

ACTION/SITUATION	OUTCOMES
Advisory committees	Necessary part of Extension programming Representative of local situation Important support structure
Improved program delivery	Better use of mass media Use of Internet
Better educated producers	Prepared to take advantage of new technology
Extension role	Educator Working with all clientele Meeting the needs of the cotton industry

### Comparison of Summaries of Agent Focus Group Interviews

- Question 1. Reflect on and express the things that stick out in your mind about advisory committees and the programming process related to the cotton industry.
- (b) Describe the membership of your cotton advisory committee.
  - (c) Describe the process that you use to select members.
  - (d) Describe how your parish cotton advisory committee functions (number of members, meetings times, activities, etc.).

Both groups described committees that included both black and white, small and large producers. One agent in Group 1 reported hispanic farmers as members. Both groups reported the majority of members as producers but did include others on the committee. Two parishes in Group 1 included consultants, researchers, or Extension specialists. Two parishes in Group 2 included consultants. Both groups selected persons who would serve, and tried to have representation from all areas of the parish. Both groups used some type of rotation but had members that had served for several years. Committee size was similar for both groups, and meeting times were similar.

Group 1 viewed the committees as a source of advice and support for developing programs. Group 2 viewed the committees as a strong source of advice and problem identification. Group 1 felt that the advisory committee legitimized Extension programs. Group 2 felt that the committee strengthened programs.

Both groups stressed that the advisory process was made up of both formal and informal meetings. Group 1 felt that the informal one-on-one contact was much more important than the formal meeting. Group 2 saw a lot of the one-on-one contact as dealing with emergencies. Both agreed that involvement of respected leaders was the key to

successful advisory committees. Both groups expressed the need for the advisory committee to include all crops, not just cotton.

**Question 2.** Name the major problem areas and needs of the cotton industry that can be addressed by the LCES.

(b) Has your parish cotton advisory committee worked on these needs?

(c) What has been accomplished or why have the needs not been worked on?

Group 1 identified more needs than Group 2. There was some overlap. Both groups listed marketing and pest management as top concerns. Group 1 expressed the need for area cotton specialists. This was not expressed by Group 2. Speed of information delivery was deemed very important by Group 1, but Group 2 did not express this as a major need or problem.

Both groups stated that the same problems and needs had been discussed at advisory committee meetings, but neither group felt that the committee had actually worked on them. Both groups agreed that individual members had assisted with demonstrations, and educational programs addressing some of these needs. No specific accomplishments were given as a result of work of the advisory committees.

Both groups saw the advisory committee's main function as problem identification and advising on program direction. Both groups felt that the development of programs was primarily the agent's responsibility. Group 1 felt that Extension administration could assist with some problems such as speed of information delivery, and the need for area specialists.

**Question 3.** As a result of their participation in the work of the advisory committee to what extent do you feel members gained knowledge of other extension programs?

Both groups agreed that committee members knew about other Extension program areas, but could cite only limited involvement by members or family members in other programs. Both groups felt that membership on the cotton/crop advisory committees had fostered understanding of other Extension programs and agent responsibilities.

Group 2 felt that having advisory committees that covered all crops gave producers a better appreciation of other programs. Group 1 agreed with this view.

**Question 4.** An important function of an advisory committee is to spread information. To what extent does your parish advisory committee work to inform clientele of extension cotton education programs. Give examples.

Group 1 felt that committee members spread a significant amount of information. Group 2 did not see this as a major function of the advisory committee.

Neither group felt that committee members were of value in conducting or serving as speakers on educational programs. Neither group viewed the advisory committee as a vehicle for developing leadership. The Ag Leadership Program was cited by both groups as being for that purpose.

Both groups viewed the advisory committee primarily as a tool for problem identification and program direction. Group 2 felt they were of value in spreading information, while Group 1 felt the committee was ineffective in that function.

**Question 5.** Based on the factors, needs and problem areas that have been identified during our discussion share your thoughts on improving the advisory committee system and Extension programming.

Both groups agreed that committees were important for problem identification and advice. Group 1 did not put as much value on the committee for programming planning as did Group 2. Group 1 felt that one-on-one contact was as valuable as formal committee

meetings. Group 2 viewed one-on-one contact as dealing with emergencies. The groups agreed that advisory committees are needed to legitimize Extension programs and provide direction. Group 1 did not show strong support for the overall advisory committee process.

Group 1 expressed the need for a written agenda for advisory committee meetings, Group 2 did not. Both agreed that the advisory committee structure needed to be changed.

Both groups agreed that Extension needed to address real and immediate needs with programming. Group 1 saw the need for additional agent training, specialized agent assignments, and area specialists. Group 2 did not. Both groups expressed the need for timely information to keep Extension credibility intact. Speed of delivery was important to both groups, but Group 2 placed more importance on mass media and Internet usage than Group 1.

Group 1 contained agents who used consultants, researchers, and specialists as part of their advisory committees, while Group 2 was strongly opposed to their involvement. Group 2 did, however, agree that programming specialists might be of value to observe and evaluate committees. Both agreed that a sound relationship with committee members and clientele was a key to effective advisory committees and programs.

**Question 6.** What are your final thoughts on the current Extension cotton advisory system and programming process after these discussions?

Group 1 was more negative concerning advisory committees. It did not view advisory committees as being very important in aligning Extension programming with the needs of the cotton industry. Group 2 thought that advisory committees were a necessary part of Extension programming.

Consultants and agribusiness personnel as competition emerged as an issue in both groups. However the groups were split in their opinions. Some agents in both groups viewed consultants and agribusiness personnel as a threat, while other agents viewed them as clientele. No consensus was reached on this issue by either group. Both groups did agree that Extension must work with consultants and agribusiness personnel, because they could not be excluded from Extension programs and information delivery.

Both groups expressed the view that improving speed of information delivery was essential to maintaining quality educational programs. The final thoughts from Group 1 centered around Extension staff development to keep agents as well trained as possible and supported by Ag Center researchers and Extension specialists. Final thoughts from Group 2 were centered around the need to maintain Extension's role as educators.

#### Perception Categories and Messages Content Indexes

Perception categories for agents' and members' perceptions were developed. Messages (original) extracted from the discussion groups were sorted by these categories and the frequency of their occurrence determined. Perception categories for agents' and members' perceptions are indicated below:

#### Final Categories of Member Perceptions

1. Initial feelings and attitudes
2. Experience with cotton advisory committees
3. Experience with Extension programming
4. Role of Extension
5. Advisory committee function

6. Advisory committee purpose
7. Problem areas and educational needs of the cotton industry
8. Advisory committee work and accomplishments
9. Involvement in other Extension programs
10. Environmental concerns
11. Timeliness of Extension information
12. Value of Extension programs
13. Effectiveness of cotton advisory committees
14. Improving Extension programs

#### Final Categories of Extension Agent Perceptions

1. Initial feelings and attitudes
2. Selection of advisory committee members
3. Parish cotton advisory committee function
4. Parish cotton advisory committee purpose
5. Problems and educational needs of the cotton industry
6. Advisory committee work and accomplishments
7. Committee members involvement with other Extension programs
8. Relationships with consultants and agri-business
9. Improving parish advisory committees
10. Improving Extension programming
11. Effectiveness of cotton advisory committees

Perceptions of members and agents overlapped in the categories of initial feelings and attitudes, and the advisory committee processes of function and purpose. Parallel discussions ensued in both groups in several areas. Categories relating to effectiveness of cotton advisory committees, improving Extension programs, involvement in other Extension programs, problem areas and educational needs of the cotton industry, and advisory committee work and accomplishments were developed for both groups.

Final categories were not the same for both groups, due to differences in discussions and messages extracted. Agents had lengthy discussions concerning relationships with consultants and agribusiness, and improving parish advisory committees; while members' discussion was limited and brief in these areas. Members discussed at length environmental concerns, timeliness of Extension information, and the value of Extension programs. Agents also discussed these areas but tended to incorporate them in other perception categories. The agent category of selection of advisory committee members was specific for the perceptions of agents. The member categories of experience with cotton advisory committees, experience with Extension programming, and role of Extension were specific for the perceptions of members. Messages grouped under the above perception categories for members and agents are shown in Appendix F.

#### Member - Agent Perceptions of Committee Effectiveness

Producer and agent perceptions were analyzed using the research model as a guide. The model focused on agent and cotton producer perception of three major dimensions of advisory committees: (a) committee purpose, (b) committee functions, and (c) programming. Committee purpose was analyzed in terms of decision making, program



acceptance, and educational experience. Committee functions were analyzed for interpretation, advisement, legitimation, and communication. Programming was studied in terms of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Based on the analysis of perceptions on these three dimensions, judgements of the effectiveness of cotton advisory committees were made.

### Committee Purpose

Many of the producers did not have a clear understanding of the purpose of advisory committees. The majority did feel that the committee's purpose was to identify problems and give the agent direction for Extension programs. The majority of the agents held a similar view. They too believed that the purpose of the committee was primarily problem identification and advisement.

Producers felt their input impacted Extension decision making to a degree. They readily admitted they were not aware of all the factors that determine the direction of educational programs. Agents did not view advisory committees as being a significant factor in final determination of educational programs. They agreed that input from committee members guided their program direction, but the final decision was made by the agent.

The agents placed a high value on advisory committees for program acceptance. They felt that a strong advisory committee could increase program acceptance significantly. They did not feel this was the only factor in program acceptance but did think that the advisory committee could positively affect the success of programs. Producers did not view the advisory committee as being very important for acceptance of Extension programs.

They cited examples of excellent programs, supported by the advisory committee that had poor participation by the general producer population. They also gave examples of programs that had been developed without input from the advisory committee but were successful. Producers did feel that program acceptance could be enhanced by a grass roots approach, using the advisory committee as a tool to assess producer attitudes and the parish situation.

Neither producers nor agents viewed the advisory committee as an educational experience. Both groups expressed the belief that the primary purpose was advising, and that other Extension activities were better suited to providing educational experiences.

#### Committee Functions

Agents viewed the advisory committee as being very important for advisement and legitimation. A dominant theme in the agent discussions was the use of the committees to advise. The majority felt that this was the most important function of the committee. Legitimation was expressed several times by the agents as being a key to successful programs. The majority felt that a major purpose of advisory committees was to legitimize programs. They felt the committees were weak in interpretation. The agents agreed that the committees would often identify problems and needs that could not be addressed by Extension. The agents felt the committee members did not have a good understanding of the limits of Extension programming.

Producers saw the primary function as one of advisement. They felt that they understood the needs and problems of the cotton industry and how they fit into parish situations. They felt that often they recognized things that the professional agent did not.

They also felt that in some situations they, as cotton producers, had more and better experience than the local agents. The producers viewed the advisory committee as a source of support for the local agent and Extension programs.

Neither group placed emphasis on the importance of the advisory committee as a means of spreading information about programs or committee work. The producers did express the desire for lists of committee members to be made public to increase communication between producers and local agents through the advisory committee members. The agents generally thought that communication of Extension programs and committee action should be handled by the agent. However, they felt that it was important to have key community leaders as a part of the advisory committee and assisting with educational programs. They thought this enhanced programs and fostered greater acceptance.

### Programming

Agents felt that planning and evaluation should be left to the professional Extension personnel. They thought that producers could play a part in initiating programs and assist with implementation of educational programs.

Producers felt that educational programs were informally evaluated by level of participation. They felt that the advisory committee was a part of program planning, and that many members played major roles in implementation.

Both groups agreed that advisory committees were involved in programming through advisement and assisting with implementation. The agents strongly felt that the

actual development of educational programs should be left to the professional Extension educator.

### Summary of Overall Effectiveness of Cotton Advisory Committees

Overall effectiveness of committees was judged by the researcher in terms of the extent to which agents and members perceived that the committees were meeting committee purpose, performing committee functions, and participating in the programming process, as defined by the research model for the study. Overall member perceptions indicated a poor understanding of the advisory committee process but substantial involvement in many research model component areas. Agents' perceptions indicated a good understanding of the process, but poor adoption of some of the research model component areas.

In the dimension of committee purpose, perceptions from both groups indicated that members had (a) strong involvement in decision making, (b) weak involvement in program acceptance, and (c) no involvement in educational experience. In the dimension of committee functions, perceptions from both groups indicated that members had (a) strong involvement in advisement and legitimation, (b) weak involvement in communication, and (c) no involvement in interpretation. In the dimension of programming, perceptions from both groups indicated that members had (a) strong involvement in implementation, (b) weak involvement in planning, and (c) no involvement in evaluation.

Member and agent perceptions indicated that the cotton advisory committee process was effective in advising agents, assisting with decision making, and legitimizing and implementing programs. The perceptions of both groups indicated that the process was not effective as an educational experience, and that members were not involved in

interpretation. The perceptions of both groups indicated that the advisory committee was weak for communication about programs.

Agents perceived the advisory committee to be more effective for program acceptance than members. Members perceived that their input into program planning contributed to the development of effective programs. Agents did not perceive this input into planning as being very effective. Members perceived that attendance at Extension programs as an effective form of evaluation. Agents did not perceive the advisory committee as having any effect on evaluation.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **Summary**

##### **Background**

The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service is the educational arm of the LSU Agricultural Center and has the mission of helping people improve their lives through an educational process which uses research-based knowledge focused on issues and needs (Programming Handbook, 1991). In Louisiana, Extension programs are based on the needs of the people as identified by advisory committees. In the LCES, advisory committees are and have been an integral part of program planning, development and implementation for many years. The LCES has, over the years, successfully used commodity/subject matter-based advisory committees to design state and parish level programs. However, in the recent past, questions have been raised by clientele, as to whether the system is fulfilling its purpose in today's rapidly changing and expanding technological environment.

In recent years, comments from the cotton commodity group have been directed to Extension administrators, conveying growing concern about the ability of Extension to deliver useful information to the cotton producers of Louisiana. This group represents an important part of the Louisiana agricultural economy and has been the recipient of a significant portion of LCES resources. The evaluation of the effectiveness of LCES cotton advisory committees is an important management function to guide system changes and direct future programming efforts.

### Purpose

The overall purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees as perceived by parish Extension agents and clientele, and to make recommendations for future research study and Extension programming.

### Objectives

1. Determine extension agents' perceptions of the effectiveness of cotton advisory committees.
2. Determine cotton producers' perceptions of the effectiveness of advisory committees.
3. Identify themes and patterns in extension agents' and cotton producers' perceptions of the effectiveness of cotton advisory committees.
4. Determine educational needs and problem areas in Extension programming related to the cotton industry of Louisiana as perceived by cotton producers and extension agents.
5. Develop recommendations, based on the identified perceptions, needs, and problem areas for improving the cotton advisory committee system and future Extension programming.

### Procedure

This study utilized focus group interviews to obtain qualitative data from individuals who had participated in the cotton advisory system. The study included members of parish cotton advisory committees and LCES field agents involved in programming related to the cotton industry.

A preliminary survey conducted using the LCES electronic mail system determined that 19 parishes had functioning cotton advisory committees. Individuals serving on cotton advisory committees in these parishes were included as the member participants. A total of 30 field agents are involved in the Extension cotton program. Nineteen of these agents were included as the agent participants.

For this study, six focus group interviews were conducted. Four sessions were held for advisory committee members and two for LCES agents. Three sites were selected: Alexandria (Central Louisiana), and Monroe and Winnsboro (Northeast Louisiana). Geographically, one interview was conducted for agents and three interviews for cotton producers in Northeast Louisiana, and one interview for each respondent group in Central Louisiana. The reason for conducting three interviews for producers in the northeast is that over 90% of all the cotton producers and 85% of the cotton acreage are in the northeast part of the state. The Winnsboro and Monroe locations allowed for the inclusion of all cotton-producing parishes in the northeast, keeping travel time to less than 1.5 hours. Two sessions were conducted at the Winnsboro location to insure adequate representation at the site located in the geographic center of the largest cotton producing area. The Alexandria location allowed for the inclusion of all cotton-producing parishes in the Red River area and Central Louisiana, keeping travel time to within 1.5 hours. A 1.5 hour travel time was seen as the maximum for the participants.

A letter was written to all selected Extension agents by Director Jack Bagent, informing them of the study and asking for their cooperation. A letter was then written by the researcher to the Extension agents in the selected parishes asking for the names of cotton



advisory committee members. The number of member participants requested was based on the parish cotton acreage and number of producers. A total sample of 46 participants was drawn.

Field agents involved in the Extension cotton education program are located in 22 parishes within 4 administrative areas. Each of these areas is administered by a district agent. A letter was written by Director Bagent to the four district agents asking for their cooperation. A total sample of 20 agents was drawn. A letter was written by Director Bagent giving approval of their participation and providing travel funds to attend the sessions.

Letters were sent to each selected agent and copies were endorsed to the appropriate administrators. Follow-up letters were sent to remind agent participants. Nine agents attended the Alexandria focus group and ten the Winnsboro session.

Letters informing the member participants were sent with a return reply post card to confirm attendance. Follow-up letters were sent to selected producer participants urging participation from Director Bagent, Ms. Donna Winters, President of the Louisiana Cotton Producers Association, and Mr. Ronnie Anderson, President of the Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation. A follow-up letter was then sent by the researcher to selected member participants who had not replied. The Alexandria session was attended by nine advisory member participants, the Monroe session was attended by five, and the Winnsboro sessions were attended by nine.

The instrument in a focus group interview involves the facility, the moderator, and the questioning plan. Adequate facilities which could provide appropriate atmosphere and

acceptability for audio and video taping were located in each of these cities. The video camera was mounted on a tripod and was elevated for taping all focus group sessions. Remote microphones were located on the tables. A back-up table top tape recorder was also used, to insure that all segments of the discussion were recorded.

Because of the importance of experience and objectivity, an individual not assigned to an Extension parish staff and not associated with parish cotton advisory committees was selected as the moderator for the clientele groups. An assistant moderator worked with the moderator during the clientele sessions and then served as the moderator for the agent groups. These individuals had expertise in group dynamics and were informed of the purpose of the study. Meetings with the moderators prior to sessions served to aid in preparation for the interviews. The researcher served as the assistant moderator for the agent sessions. The researcher was not present during the clientele sessions.

A questioning plan was prepared for the sessions. The questioning plan involved questions ordered to move the group from the more general to the specific. The sessions lasted between one and one half and two hours.

### Data Analysis

Data in this qualitative study were in the form of audio and video tapes, and moderator and researcher notes. The video and audio tapes were analyzed for two purposes: (a) to extract individual messages, and (b) to summarize by question the focus group interview participant comments.

The researcher extracted and sorted the messages into naturally occurring categories. The categories were discussed with the moderators and final categories were negotiated. A content index was developed indicating the messages as sorted to the final categories.

Individual question summaries were done by the researcher for each question in each interview. The individual question summaries for agents were compared, and the individual question summaries for committee members were compared. Summaries of each of these comparisons were written. Action/situation-outcomes tables were developed from the individual question summaries. Committee member and agent perceptions were analyzed using the research model. The extent to which committee members and agents agreed that Extension cotton advisory committees have been effective was judged. From the two groups' categorized content indexes and the individual question summary comparisons, and the research model analysis, themes arose that represented the findings of this study. The themes were then studied across groups, and patterns in their perceptions emerged. These patterns in the perceptions are the conclusions of this study.

### Findings and Conclusions

Objective One: Determine extension agents' perceptions of the effectiveness of cotton advisory committees

Extension agents' perceptions pertaining to LCES cotton advisory committees are presented here as a series of themes. These themes emerged from the analysis of their statements and responses to a series of open-ended questions and the resulting discussions. These themes are organized using the research model and presented in sequence.

## Themes - Agent Focus Group Interviews

### Committee Purpose

1. Committee membership is very diverse and involves all elements of the industry.
2. Producer involvement is the key to successful committees.
3. Parish advisory committees should include all row crops, not just cotton.
4. The primary function of an advisory committee is problem identification and advising on program direction.
5. Serving on an advisory committee increased members' knowledge of other program areas and agent responsibilities.
6. The value of parish Extension programs is better recognized by clientele as a result of participation in advisory committees.
7. Committee purpose is best defined as useful for decision making and necessary for program acceptance.
8. The advisory committee process is not an educational experience for producers.

### Committee Functions

1. Provides legitimation for Extension programs.
2. Some agents saw the parish cotton advisory committee functioning best in only an advisory role.
3. The selection of and communication with key producers who are recognized as community leaders is an imperative in successful advisory committees.
4. It is very important to add young farmers to the advisory committee whenever possible.
5. Agents should maintain one-on-one contact with committee members throughout the year.
6. The committee functions best in the areas of advisement and legitimation.

### Programming

1. Program development is primarily the responsibility of the agent.
2. Cotton advisory committee members are primarily involved in programming related to agriculture, with little involvement by them or family members in other program areas.
3. Extension must include consultants and agri-business personnel as a part of the advisory committee process.
4. The committee is valuable in assisting with program implementation.
5. Program planning should be left to the professional extension educator.
6. Advisory committees are not a significant factor in final determination of educational programs.
7. Advisory committees are not useful for program evaluation.

Objective Two: Determine cotton producers' perceptions of the effectiveness of advisory committees.

Cotton producers' perceptions pertaining to the effectiveness of advisory committees are presented here as a series of themes. These themes emerged from the analysis of their statements and responses to a series of open-ended questions and the resulting discussions. These themes are organized using the research model and presented in sequence.

### Themes - Producer Focus Group Interviews

#### Committee Purpose

1. Advisory committee members have a good working relationship with parish Extension agents.
2. Serving on the parish advisory committee is a positive experience.
3. Parish advisory committees should include all crops grown in the parish, not just cotton.

4. The involvement of young producers is essential for continuation of the advisory committee process.
5. The purpose of advisory committees is to identify problems and give the county agent direction for Extension programs.
6. Input from advisory committees impacted Extension decision making.
7. The advisory committee is not very important for acceptance of Extension programs.
8. Program acceptance can be enhanced by a grass roots approach, using the advisory committee as a tool to assess producer attitudes and true parish situation.
9. Committee members desire to be a part of the advisory committee process.
10. Producers views of Extension were enhanced through service on advisory committees.
11. The advisory committee meetings need a written agenda, and a clearly-understood purpose.
12. The advisory committee is not an educational experience.

#### Committee Functions

1. A significant amount of information is spread by committee members through personal communications and by assisting the county agent with programs.
2. The spreading of Extension information is primarily the responsibility of the local county agent.
3. Primary function of an advisory committee is for advisement.
4. The advisory committee is a source of support for the local agent and Extension programs.
5. Public recognition of committee members could enhance communications between the general producer population and parish agents and foster greater acceptance of programs.
6. The involvement of a broad cross-section of individuals involved in the cotton industry is important for successful functioning of advisory committees.

### Programming

1. The biggest obstacle to effective advisory committees and successful extension programs is that of getting producers involved.
2. Cotton producers are primarily involved in the agricultural program area, with little to no involvement by themselves or family members in other programs.
3. Cotton advisory committee members support all Extension program areas.
5. Advisory committees assist with program initiation and play a major role in implementation.
4. Advisory committee actions and Extension programs are evaluated by level of clientele participation.

Objective Three: Identify themes and patterns in extension agents' and cotton producers' perceptions of the effectiveness of cotton advisory committees.

The themes that reflected the perceptions of the two groups were combined and organized in the order of the advisory committee process as outlined in the research model, with emergent patterns identified and conclusions developed. A conclusion was developed for the perceptions of the overall effectiveness of cotton advisory committees using the combined themes of both groups. Patterns of agreement and lack of agreement between the two groups were emphasized.

Some perceptions could have only been held by agents. This is attributed to their formal training which gave them a better understanding of advisory committee purpose and function. The agents also had a better understanding of the limitations of Extension programming.

1. Perception patterns related to committee purpose.

Patterns were observed in several points of agreement by producers and agents. Both groups agreed that the primary purpose of the advisory committee should be to identify problems and give the county agent direction for Extension programs. There was also general agreement that producer involvement is the key to successful committees.

It was observed that both groups viewed decision making as a part of the advisory committee purpose. Both groups also felt that the involvement of a broad cross section of clientele aided in the decision making process.

Producers generally thought that the advisory committee was not very important for acceptance of Extension programs. However, they did feel that program acceptance can be enhanced by a grass roots approach, using the advisory committee as a tool to assess producer attitudes and the parish situation. The agents also thought that program acceptance was enhanced by having key community leaders as members of the advisory committee.

Neither producers nor agents perceived the advisory committee process as an educational experience for members.

**Conclusion:** Advisory committees strongly influence decision making related to Extension programming, have limited influence on program acceptance, and are not considered to be an educational experience by members or agents.

2. Perception patterns related to committee functions.

No involvement was cited by either group with regard to the function of interpretation. A clear pattern for both groups emerged with regard to advisement being the primary function of advisory committees. Some agents viewed the committee functioning



best in an advisement role only. Producers felt that their biggest input into Extension programming came from advising agents on program direction.

A pattern was observed in the committee function of legitimation. The agent group stated that legitimation for Extension programs was a very important function of an advisory committee. Producers also expressed the importance of this function for advisory committees. They stated the need for a broad cross section of key representatives of the parish cotton industry to be involved in the committee process to aid with acceptance of new recommended ideas and practices. The agents also felt that serving on an advisory committee increased members knowledge and appreciation of other Extension program areas. The producer group reflected this view by expressing support for all Extension program areas.

Producers felt that a significant amount of information is spread by committee members, but communication of Extension information is primarily the responsibility of the parish agent. The agent group felt that strong communication with key producers who are recognized as community leaders, is an imperative in successful advisory committees. Producers also felt that public recognition of committee members could enhance communication between the general farm population and parish extension agents.

**Conclusion:** Committee members are strongly involved in advisement, have some involvement in legitimation and communication, but no involvement in interpretation related to the advisory committee process.

### 3. Perception patterns related to programming.

The agent group felt that program planning should be left to the professional extension educator. The producer group did not see a need for the committee to be involved

in planning programs except for problem identification and providing program direction. A pattern of limited involvement in planning was observed.

Both groups felt the advisory committees were strongly involved in implementation. Agents and producers cited several examples of implementation, such as field days, working on production meetings, and hosting on-farm demonstrations.

The groups had somewhat conflicting views on evaluation. Agents did not view this as a viable part of the advisory committee process and cited no involvement by committee members in program evaluation. However, producers felt that advisory committee actions and Extension programs are evaluated by the level of clientele participation. There were no examples of formal evaluations cited by either group.

**Conclusion:** In the advisory committee process of programming, members have strong involvement in implementation, weak in planning, and none in evaluation.

#### 4. Perceptions of the overall effectiveness of cotton advisory committees.

Advisory committee members have a good working relationship with parish Extension agents. Throughout the focus group sessions the producers expressed positive support for Extension programs. They expressed support for both cotton programs and other Extension program areas. Both agents and producers have a desire to be a part of the advisory committee process, but expressed the desire for some needed changes.

Serving on the parish cotton advisory committee was perceived to be a positive experience by the producers. The producers expressed several concerns, not reflected in the agents' comments. The producers felt that the committee needs a more defined purpose. They also expressed the desire for a written agenda prior to meetings. Producers perceived

the advisory committee as being constructive and useful, but not being utilized to the extent it could be. They expressed the desire for committee members to play a role as liaison between Extension and the agriculture community. They felt this could be accomplished by increasing the public awareness of advisory committee membership and activities. The desire for public recognition of committee members was expressed as one means of accomplishing this.

Agents perceived the advisory committee to be valuable for problem identification, advisement, legitimation, and to assist with program implementation. Some agents perceived the committee functioning best in only an advisory role. The agents did not perceive the need for the committee to be involved in actual program planning or evaluation. Agents perceived the one-on-one contact throughout the year to be more important to program success than the formal advisory committee meetings.

Both groups felt that the producers' knowledge and appreciation of other Extension programs had been enhanced by service on the cotton advisory committee. Producers and agents agreed that the committee structure needed to be changed to include all crops, not just cotton. They also agreed that the key to sustaining the advisory committee system was the recruitment and involvement of young farmers. Another point of agreement was the perception that a broad cross section of the parish with involvement from key community leaders was essential. Both groups perceived the primary purpose of advisory committees as being one of providing input for decision making, and the primary function as advisement. They also agreed that a strong point of the committee was assisting with program implementation and acceptance.

Neither group perceived service on the advisory committee as an educational experience for producers. The perception of both groups was that the parish advisory committee process was valuable and should be continued.

**Conclusion 1:** Agents and committee members have a good working relationship. Producers perceive serving on the advisory committee as a positive experience. Involvement is strong in some component areas of the research model and nonexistent in others.

**Conclusion 2:** The parish advisory committee process should continue to function but is in need of change. Changes need to be made to increase producer involvement in the research model components of: (a) educational experience, (b) interpretation, (c) planning, and (d) evaluation.

Objective Four	Determine educational needs and problem areas in Extension programming related to the cotton industry of Louisiana as perceived by cotton producers and extension agents.
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Several major educational needs and problem areas in Extension programming related to the cotton industry of Louisiana were determined. These needs and problem areas were determined by a qualitative analysis of the agent and producer statements that resulted from their responses to a series of open-ended questions and the related discussions. The perceptions of cotton producers and extension agents varied somewhat, but overlapped in many areas.

Agents perceived educational programs in the areas of marketing and pest management to be of the most importance in addressing the current needs of the cotton industry. They identified the need for area subject matter specialists to provide technical support for both agents and those involved in the cotton industry. The speed of delivery of Extension information was cited as being a major problem. In addition to these, a strong desire was expressed for a better working relationship among extension, research, agri-

business, and consultants. The working relationship with consultants was expressed as a major problem area. The need for a handbook for cotton production and keeping Extension at the forefront of bio-technology were also expressed as major needs related to developing educational programs for the cotton industry in Louisiana.

Producers discussed several problem areas and educational needs. Producers deemed information transfer to be the problem area of biggest concern, and increasing the speed of delivery of Extension information as the most important need. Producers felt that another major problem was public awareness of the importance of agriculture. The need for positive exposure of agriculture in the news media was considered to be very important in addressing this problem.

Producer involvement in Extension programs was considered to be a problem. The producers also cited environmental stewardship, standardized pesticide regulations, and a pesticide record keeping system as areas of concern that Extension programs could assist with. The need for Extension to provide producers with unbiased information was cited as very necessary to insure that information received from consultants and agribusiness representatives was correct and in the best interest of the farmers. Producers also cited the need for the latest bio-technology information and integrated pest management recommendations from Extension. The need for educational programs and more information addressing marketing and farm management were thought to be very important needs.

Both groups agreed that the speed of delivery of Extension information was a major problem. Both groups also agreed that biased information from agribusiness and poor

working relationships between Extension and consultants were problems. The need for educational programs in marketing, pest management, and bio-technology was determined to be very important to both groups.

**Conclusion:** Speed of information delivery and developing sound working relationships are the major problem areas. Educational programs are needed in the areas of marketing, bio-technology, pesticide record keeping, and integrated pest management. Producers desire Extension to become more involved in educating the public about the importance of agriculture.

### Recommendations

**Objective Five:** Develop recommendations, based on the identified perceptions, needs, and problem areas for improving the cotton advisory committee structure and future Extension programming.

### Recommendations for Improving the Advisory Committee System

Analyzing perceptions in the framework of the research model, it was found that involvement of advisory committee members was weak with regard to program acceptance, communication, and planning. Involvement was very weak to nonexistent in interpretation, evaluation, and educational experience. Therefore, the advisory committee process could be strengthened by adoption of the following recommendations.

1. Establish one parish advisory committee to cover all crops, not just cotton. Due to the "freedom to farm" legislation, included in the 1995 USDA Farm bill, most producers now farm more than one crop and are apt to change crops from year to year. The establishment of all-crop advisory committees will allow for the changing of the agenda from year to year to best fit the needs of the parish producers. This can be accomplished by merging existing commodity advisory committees and meeting one overall committee prior to the growing season to discuss commodity selections that best fit the market situation for the upcoming year. Work of the committee could then be directed to address the problems and needs of commodities

being grown that production season. Future farm legislation may make it necessary to revert back to commodity specific committee as needs change.

2. More effective representation and participation of a broad cross section of individuals involved in the agriculture industry, with particular attention given to including consultants, agri-business, research personnel, and state specialists. This will strengthen the model component areas of program acceptance and communication. It will also provide additional assistance for agents in program planning. This can be accomplished by identifying leaders in all segments of the row crop agriculture industry and including them in committee membership.
3. Recruit and involve more young producers in the advisory committee process. This will nurture continuity of the process. To accomplish this agents will need staff development training in volunteer selection and utilization.
4. Through staff development training, equip agents with a better understanding of the advisory committee process and developing volunteer leadership skills. This will enhance the full utilization of the advisory committee process for program development, and as an educational experience.
5. Agents improve committee management by (a) providing members with a written agenda and clearly-understood purpose for advisory meetings, (b) increase public recognition of committee members, and (c) maintain one-on-one contact with members throughout the year, (d) prepare and mail out minutes of advisory committee meetings to all parish producers and other involved in the cotton industry.

#### **Recommendations for Improving Extension Programming**

1. Utilize the Internet and other electronic communications to speed delivery of information. One important way to supplement this is to use e-mail to transmit recommendations to district office print shops for mass reproduction and distribute to producers.
2. Create and staff area communication specialist positions in the cotton-producing areas of the state. This will speed delivery of information, increase mass media utilization, and enhance the image of the LCES.
3. Emphasize programming in the areas of marketing, farm management, biotechnology, and integrated pest management. Create and staff area

specialists positions for agricultural economics and weed science in the cotton producing areas of the state. This will speed the delivery of information and problem-solving assistance to producers.

4. Develop a handbook for cotton production that can be easily updated as needed. This will make information readily available to producers. Once developed, the handbook could be quickly updated using e-mail, the Internet, or direct contact.
5. Utilize the program areas of 4-H and home economics to convey information to the general public about the importance of agriculture.
6. Develop a close working relationship with research counterparts to enhance program development and delivery.
7. Enhance technical in-service training and support professional improvement opportunities. This would improve the expertise of parish level agents. This enhancement could be accomplished by: (a) continuous in-service training, and (b) establishing and develop a transition training program for young agents moving into agricultural work assignments.

Many of the findings, resulting from this study, could be examined to determine if they are applicable to other program areas and Extension programming. The recommendations for staff development training and committee management could be examined to see if they would improve the advisory committee process in other Extension program areas. Utilization of the Internet and other electronic communications should be a priority in all program areas.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

The research model, while designed to evaluate cotton advisory committees, could be used to study the advisory committee process in other Extension program areas. Focus groups or other data gathering techniques could be used to assess committee effectiveness



as defined in the research model. The knowledge base of the advisory committee process would be enhanced if future perception studies would consider the following suggestions:

1. Utilize the research model to study the advisory committee system for the 4-H and home economics program areas and compare with the results of this study.
2. One of the concerns cited by both producers and agents was the low level of involvement in extension education programs. Research to determine effective methods to involve clientele in the committee process would be very beneficial to the LCES.
3. Producers had a poor understanding of the full advisory committee process. Agents were weak in their understanding of some areas of the process as related to the research model. A study to determine effective training methods for Extension to use to assist agents and clientele in understanding advisory committee purpose, function, and utilization would be of value to the LCES.
4. Through an in-depth study the role or roles that agents and clientele are playing in the advisory committee process could be defined. This would assist Extension administration and program development specialists to determine staff development training needs.
5. Through the use of case studies of parishes that have successful advisory committees, factors contributing to a successful advisory committee process could be determined. This information could be used to formulate plans of action to improve the advisory committee process in all parishes.
6. This study focused on the perceptions of cotton producers. A study to determine the perceptions of consultants, agribusiness, and research personnel related to Extension cotton education programs would be beneficial to the LCES for future program development.
7. This study focused on the effectiveness of LCES cotton advisory committees. A study to evaluate the effectiveness of Extension education programs related to meeting the needs of the cotton industry in Louisiana would be the next logical step in determining program direction for this audience.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Survey for Preliminary Data Collection**



Louisiana State University  
**Agricultural Center**  
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service

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Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

October 21, 1996

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

**TO:** Caddo, Bossier, DeSoto, Red River, Natchitoches, Grant, Rapides, Avoyelles, Evangeline, St. Landry, Pointe Coupee, Morehouse, West Carroll, East Carroll, Ouachita, Richland, Madison, Caldwell, Franklin, Tensas, Catahoula, Concordia, LCES Administration

**RE: COTTON ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**ATTENTION:** Jon Lowe, Albert Doughty, Donnie Frazier, John LeVasseur, Charles Johnson, Rodney Houston, John Harris, Dr. Carlos Smith, Aubrey Mire, Keith Normand, Miles Brashier, Terry Erwin, Myrl Sistrunk, Don Weston, John Barnett, Bill Watkins, Mike Rome, Gary Wilson, Bill Russell, Robert Goodson, David Neal, Glen Daniels

With the support of Director Bagent, I am currently conducting a study of the cotton industry in Louisiana. Your parish has been identified as a cotton producing parish with more than 1,000 acres in production.

A major focus of this study is the cotton advisory committee system that is now in place. To gain some preliminary information I am asking that you take a few minutes to respond to the four questions on the enclosed document. Please BBS or fax your responses back to me by Friday, October 25, 1996. My fax number is (318) 387-9376.

Sincerely,

John W. Barnett  
County Agent  
Ouachita Parish

c: Dr. Jack Bagent  
Dr. Satish Verma

**E-Mail Correspondence**



THE LOUISIANA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE PROVIDES EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PROGRAMS AND EMPLOYMENT. LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND A & M COLLEGE, LOUISIANA PARISH GOVERNING BODIES, SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY, AND UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING  
A State Partner in the Cooperative Extension System



## QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COTTON ADVISORY COMMITTEE

1. Do you currently have a functioning cotton advisory committee? (If yes continue to question 2)

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

2. How many members make up your cotton advisory committee?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. How often does your cotton advisory committee meet?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do members of your cotton advisory committee assist with program planning, implementing, or evaluation? Please give examples.

Planning Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Examples: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Implementation Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Examples: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Evaluation Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Examples: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX B**

**Letters Pertaining to Focus Group Meetings**



Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

**E-Mail Correspondence**

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

March 12, 1997

**TO: Selected Agents in Cotton Producing Parishes**

**RE: John Barnett's Dissertation**

John Barnett will soon be collecting data for his Dissertation, which is a study of the effectiveness of LCES cotton advisory committees. The purpose of his study is to determine the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees as perceived by parish Extension agents and producers. I agree with the subject matter and he has my approval.

Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs and problem areas in Extension programming related to the cotton industry of Louisiana. You are asked to give appropriate consideration to help John complete this study.

He will contact you requesting a short list of producers who have experience with cotton advisory committees and Extension programming in your parish. When preparing the requested list, please give attention to including producers representing all aspects and viewpoints.

At a later date he will contact you to share your views as a part of the study.

Sincerely,

Jack L. Bagent  
Vice Chancellor and Director

c: District Agents





Louisiana State University  
**Agricultural Center**  
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service

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March 14, 1997

Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

Dr. Gene Baker  
Division Leader (Environmental Programs)  
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service  
P. O. Box 25100  
Baton Rouge, LA 70894-5100

**RE: Focus Group Interviews with Cotton Producers**

Dear Gene,

Listed below are the sites and schedules for the focus group interviews with cotton producers.

Monday, April 7, 1997 - 1:30 p.m.  
Dean Lee Research Station, LSU-A

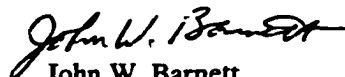
Tuesday, April 8, 1997 - 9:00 a.m.  
NLU Agricultural Mechanization Building  
Northeast University, Highway 80 East  
Monroe, La.

Tuesday, April 8, 1997 - 2:00 p.m.  
Macon Ridge Station  
Winnsboro, La.

I sent out e-mail messages today requesting the producer names from the Extension agents. Hopefully I will be able to select producers and start contacting them by March 24th.

Give me a call if you have any questions. Thanks for your assistance.

Sincerely,

  
John W. Barnett  
County Agent

c: Dr. Earl Johnson  
Dr. Satish Verma  
Mrs. Margaret Hayes  
Mr. Howard Gryder  
Dr. Rosalie Bivin  
Dr. Jack Bagent



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Louisiana State University  
**Agricultural Center**  
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service

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**E-Mail Correspondence**

Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

March 14, 1997

TO: David Neal

RE: Study of Effectiveness of LCES Cotton Advisory Committees

Dear David:

In Director Bagent's March 12, 1997 e-mail memorandum to you he indicated that Extension would be conducting a study of the effectiveness of LCES cotton advisory committees. The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees as perceived by parish Extension agents and producers.


Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs and problem areas in Extension programming related to the cotton industry of Louisiana. To complete the study I will need your help.

Focus group interviews will be used as the method of qualitative assessment. This method has been shown effective in determining individual participants in-depth thoughts and attitudes concerning programs of this type. In order to proceed with the study I will need the names, addresses and phone numbers of three (3) cotton producers who have experience with cotton advisory committees and Extension programming in your parish. Please try to include producers representing all aspects and viewpoints of the cotton industry and Extension.

I plan to conduct the interviews with the producers before the cotton planting season begins, so please submit the names for your parish to me by March 21, 1997. At a later date I will be contacting agents to share their views as a part of the study.

Thank you in advance for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

  
John W. Barnett  
County Agent  
Ouachita Parish

c: Dr. Satish Verma  
Howard Gryder, Interim District Agent



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Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

March 14, 1997

Dr. Wink Alison  
Macon Ridge Research Station  
212 Macon Ridge Road  
Winnsboro, LA 71295

Dear Wink,

This is to confirm my use of the meeting room at the Macon Ridge Research Station on Tuesday, April 8, 1997. I will need use of the room from 12:30 p.m. till 4:30 p.m.

I will be using the room to conduct a focus group interview with area cotton producers. This focus group interview session is part of my study of the effectiveness of LCES cotton advisory committees. The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees as perceived by parish Extension agents and producers.

The study has the approval of Extension Director Jack Bagent. Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs and problem areas in Extension programming related to the cotton industry of Louisiana.

Thanks for the assistance.

Sincerely,

John W. Barnett  
County Agent

JWB/dr

c: Dr. Bob Hutchinson  
Mr. Howard Gryder



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Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

March 14, 1997

Mr. Glynn Tubbs  
NLU Foundation  
NLU Station  
Monroe, LA 71209-3200

**Re: Use of NLU Ag Mech Facility**

Dear Glynn,

As per our recent telephone conversation I am requesting the use of the agricultural mechanization building on Tuesday, April 8, 1997. I will need use of the building from 7:30 a.m. till 12:30 p.m.

I will be using the classroom in the building to conduct a discussion meeting with area cotton producers. This meeting is one of a series that I am conducting around the state as part of a study of the Louisiana cotton industry. The study is an approved LSU Agricultural Center doctoral research project. Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs related to the cotton industry in Louisiana.

Thank you in advance for the use of the facility. Be sure and call on me whenever I can be of assistance to you and the NLU farm.

Sincerely,

John W. Barnett  
County Agent

JWB/dr

c: Howard Gryder



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Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

March 14, 1997

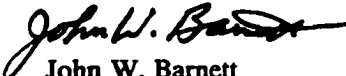
Mr. John Harris  
County Agent  
P. O. Box 1032  
Alexandria, LA 71309-1032

Dear John,

Thanks for the assistance in securing a meeting facility for the focus group interview with area cotton producers on the afternoon of April 7, 1997. I have contacted Janis at the Dean Lee Research Station and have everything arranged.

Your assistance is appreciated, call on me whenever I can be of help to you.

Sincerely,

  
John W. Barnett  
County Agent

JWB/dr

c: Dr. Jack Kreider  
Resident Director, Dean Lee Research Station  
Mr. Howard Gryder





Louisiana State University  
**Agricultural Center**  
 Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service

Office of the Vice Chancellor and Director

March 25, 1997

Mailing Address P. O. Box 25100  
 Baton Rouge, LA 70894-5100

Office: J. Norman Efferson Hall  
 LSU Agricultural Center  
 (504) 388-6083  
 Fax: (504) 388-4225

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO: Selected Louisiana Cotton Producers**

**RE: Cotton Advisory Study**

The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) is very concerned about delivering quality programs and information to the cotton producers of Louisiana. As a part of Extension's desire to continue to improve its organization and its programming, we are conducting an evaluation of the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees. I am asking you to help the LCES evaluate its cotton advisory committee system and programming.

John Barnett, Ouachita Parish County Agent, is conducting a study that will assess the Extension cotton advisory committee system from the perspective of Extension faculty and cotton producers. He will contact you with further details about the study and the group interview sessions that he plans to conduct.

I realize this is a busy time of year, but I do ask that you participate if at all possible. Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs and problem areas in Extension programming related to the Louisiana cotton industry.

Your prompt attention to this matter will be appreciated.

Sincerely

Jack L. Bagent  
 Vice Chancellor and Director

JLB/JB/vbc

c: Dr. Rosalie Bivin  
 Dr. Clint Depew  
 Dr. Bill Davis  
 Dr. Severn Doughty  
 Terril D. Faul  
 Dr. Gene Baker  
 Dr. Satish Verma  
 Dr. Earl Johnson  
 Howard Gryder  
 John Barnett



Louisiana State University  
**Agricultural Center**  
 Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service

March 25, 1997

Mr. Shep Crigler  
 Route 1, Box 119  
 St. Joseph, LA 71366

Ouachita Parish Office  
 704 Cypress Street  
 West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
 Fax: (318) 387-9376

Dear Mr. Crigler,

The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) is very concerned about delivering quality programs and information to the cotton producers of Louisiana. As a part of Extension's desire to continue to improve its organization and its programming, we are conducting an evaluation of the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees. I am asking you to help the LCES evaluate its cotton advisory committee system and programming.


At 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 8, 1997, in the meeting room of the Macon Ridge Research Station at Winnsboro, Louisiana, a focus group interview will be conducted. At this meeting a moderator will be asking a limited number of questions to the group. These questions are designed to lead to a comfortable, constructive and informative session.

The session will be observed by trained observers and will be recorded so that it can be studied for content at a later time. Focus group interviews have been proven as one of the best approaches to evaluate and improve educational programs.

I realize that this is a busy time of the year but this is the very earliest date that I could get the study started and the session will last no longer than 2 hours. You were selected because you are a leader in the Louisiana cotton industry, please try to attend. Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs and problems areas in Extension programming related to the Louisiana cotton industry.

I am enclosing a confirmation card of your attendance. Please return it to me as soon as possible. Looking forward to seeing you on April 8, 1997.

Sincerely

  
 John W. Barnett  
 County Agent

JWB/dr

Enclosure

C: Howard Gryder  
 Dr. Satish Verma  
 Dr. Gene Baker  
 Dr. Earl Johnson



THE LOUISIANA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE PROVIDES EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PROGRAMS AND EMPLOYMENT. LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND A & M COLLEGE, LOUISIANA PARISH GOVERNING BODIES, SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY, AND UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING  
 A State Partner in the Cooperative Extension System



Louisiana State University

**Agricultural Center**

Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service

March 25, 1997

Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

Mr. Jerry Hunter  
1457 Station Highway 17  
Delhi, LA 71232

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

Dear Mr. Hunter,

The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) is very concerned about delivering quality programs and information to the cotton producers of Louisiana. As a part of Extension's desire to continue to improve its organization and its programming, we are conducting an evaluation of the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees. I am asking you to help the LCES evaluate its cotton advisory committee system and programming.

At 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, April 8, 1997, in the Northeast University Agricultural Mechanization Facility located on Highway 80 East, on the NLU Farm, a focus group interview will be conducted. At this meeting a moderator will be asking a limited number of questions to the group. These questions are designed to lead to a comfortable, constructive and informative session.

The session will be observed by trained observers and will be recorded so that it can be studied for content at a later time. Focus group interviews have been proven as one of the best approaches to evaluate and improve educational programs.

I realize that this is a busy time of the year but this is the very earliest date that I could get the study started and the session will last no longer than 2 hours. You were selected because you are a leader in the Louisiana cotton industry, please try to attend. Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs and problems areas in Extension programming related to the Louisiana cotton industry.

I am enclosing a confirmation card of your attendance. Please return it to me as soon as possible. Looking forward to seeing you on April 8, 1997.

Sincerely

John W. Barnett  
County Agent

JWB/dr

Enclosure

C: Howard Gryder  
Dr. Satish Verma  
Dr. Gene Baker  
Dr. Earl Johnson



THE LOUISIANA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE PROVIDES EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PROGRAMS AND EMPLOYMENT. LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND A & M COLLEGE, LOUISIANA PARISH GOVERNING BODIES, SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY, AND UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING  
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Louisiana State University  
**Agricultural Center**  
 Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service

March 25, 1997

Mr. Larry LaFleur  
 18065 Highway 182  
 Bunkie, LA 71322-9434

Ouachita Parish Office  
 704 Cypress Street  
 West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
 Fax: (318) 387-9376

Dear Mr. LaFleur,

The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) is very concerned about delivering quality programs and information to the cotton producers of Louisiana. As a part of Extension's desire to continue to improve its organization and its programming, we are conducting an evaluation of the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees as perceived by parish Extension agents and producers. I am asking you to help the LCES evaluate the Extension advisory committee system and programming.


At 1:30 p.m. on Monday, April 7, 1997 in the main office meeting room of the Dean Lee Research Station at LSU-A, a focus group interview will be conducted. At this meeting a moderator will be asking a limited number of questions to the group. These questions are designed to lead to a comfortable, constructive and informative session.

The session will be observed by trained observers and will be recorded so that it can be studied for content at a later time. Focus group interviews have been proven as one of the best approaches to evaluate and improve educational programs.

I realize that this is a busy time of the year but this is the very earliest date that I could get the study started and the session will last no longer than 2 hours. You were selected because you are a leader in the Louisiana cotton industry, please try to attend. Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs and problems areas in Extension programming related to the Louisiana cotton industry.

I am enclosing a confirmation card of your attendance. Please return it to me as soon as possible. Looking forward to seeing you on April 7, 1997.

Sincerely

  
 John W. Barnett  
 County Agent

JWB/dr

Enclosure

C: Howard Gryder  
 Dr. Satish Verma  
 Dr. Gene Baker  
 Dr. Earl Johnson



THE LOUISIANA COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE PROVIDES EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PROGRAMS AND EMPLOYMENT. LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND A & M COLLEGE, LOUISIANA PARISH GOVERNING BODIES, SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY, AND UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE COOPERATING  
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# LOUISIANA COTTON PRODUCERS ASSOCIATION

*An Organization Dedicated to the Interests of the Cotton Grower*

508 North 31st Street

Monroe, LA 71201

**PRESIDENT**  
Donna Winters  
Lake Providence

**1ST VICE PRESIDENT**  
Jay Hardwick  
Newellton

**2ND VICE PRESIDENT**  
Charlie Noble  
Rayville

**TREASURER**  
Cliff Wilkerson  
Newellton

**SECRETARY**  
Boyd Holley  
Bastrop

**EX-VICE PRESIDENT**  
David Ruppenicker  
Monroe

## PAST PRESIDENTS

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Lake Providence

Duke Shackelford  
Bonita

Bruce Lynn  
Gilliam

Joe Mott  
Oak Ridge

Sam Leake  
Newellton

Fred Schneider, III  
Lake Providence

Dalton Pittman  
Shreveport

Kelly Couch  
Frogmore

John "Duke" Barr  
Oak Ridge

Ned Edmondson  
Lake Providence

Dan P. Logan, Jr.  
Gilliam

Wayne McDonald, Jr.  
Oak Ridge

Kenneth Methvin  
Natchitoches

John Shackelford  
Bonita

W. A. "Billy" Guthrie  
Newellton

John L. "Jack" Dailey  
Extension

**March 27, 1997**

**To: Selected Louisiana Cotton Producers**

**Re: LCES Cotton Advisory Study**


The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) is very concerned about delivering quality programs and information to the cotton producers of Louisiana. As a part of Extension's desire to continue to improve its organization and its programming, they are conducting an evaluation of the effectiveness of Extension cotton advisory committees and programming. Because of your leadership in the cotton industry, you have been selected to be a part of this evaluation.

I realize that this is a busy time of the year, but, I encourage you to participate if at all possible. Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs and problem areas in Extension programming related to the Louisiana cotton industry.

John Barnett, Ouachita Parish County Agent, is conducting the study. The study will assess the Extension cotton advisory committee system from the prospective of extension faculty and cotton producers. He will contact you with further details about the study and the group interview sessions that he plans to conduct.

Please try to assist John in completing this very important study.

Sincerely,



**Donna B. Winters**  
**President**

**cc: John Barnett**

(318) 322-2999 • 1-800-798-2999 • FAX (318) 329-8894



Voice of Louisiana  
Agriculture

## **Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation, Inc.**

P.O. BOX 95004 • 9516 AIRLINE HIGHWAY  
BATON ROUGE, LA. 70895-9004 • PH. 504.922-6200

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March 31, 1997

**TO:** Selected Louisiana Cotton Producers  
**FROM:** Ronald Anderson, President  
**RE:** Cotton Advisory Study

**Dear Producer:**

The Louisiana Farm Bureau Federation (LFBF) has recently received notification that you have been selected by the LSU Cooperative Extension Service to serve on a focus group panel that will evaluate the Extension services' parish cotton advisory committees. The study being conducted by Mr. John Barnett, Quachita Parish County Agent, will use input from you and other selected cotton producers to assess the effectiveness of the Extension services' parish cotton committees from the perspective of cotton producers as well as Extension faculty.

The goal of this study is to provide the Extension Service with information that may identify any problems in current programming and help the Extension Service meet the educational needs of the Louisiana cotton industry. Although, I recognize that this is a busy time of year, I encourage you to attend if at all possible. Your participation will help insure that research information continues to be provided to our state's cotton farmers through the most effective means possible.

The focus group interviews are scheduled as follows:

**Monday, April 7, 1997 - 1:30 p.m.**  
**Dean Lee Research Station**  
**LSU -Alexandria, Hwy 71 South**

**Tuesday, April 8, 1997 - 9:00 a.m.**  
**NLU Agricultural Mechanization Building**  
**Northeast University, Hwy. 80 East**  
**Monroe, La.**

**Tuesday, April, 8, 1997 - 2:00 p.m.**  
**Macon Ridge Research Station - Hwy. 15**  
**Winnsboro, La.**

Mr. Barnett will contact with you with additional details concerning the interviews. If you have any questions, Mr. Barnett can be reached at (318) 323-2251.

Sincerely,

  
Ronald Anderson  
President

*President*  
RONALD ANDERSON  
P.O. Box 25, Line Road  
Ethel, La. 70730

*1st Vice-President*  
TED GLASER  
P.O. Box 61  
Oscar, La. 70762

*2nd Vice-President*  
BRYAN MITCHELL  
2105 Camo Zion Road  
Doyline, La. 71023-9525

*3rd Vice-President*  
LINDA G. ZAUNBRECHER  
29405 Burnell Rd  
Gueydan, La. 70542

*Secretary-Treasurer*  
JACKIE THERIOT  
1059 St. Rita  
St. Martinville, La. 70580

**REMINDER**

I am asking you to help the LCES evaluate its cotton advisory committee system and programming.

At 2:00 p.m. on Monday, April 17, 1997, in the meeting room of the Macon Ridge Research Station at Winnsboro, LA, a focus group interview will be conducted.

Please try to attend.

Sincerely,

John W. Barnett  
County Agent, Ouachita Parish

- ☐ Yes, I will be able to participate
- ☐ No, I can not participate

---

Name

---

Parish

**Post Cards**



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Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

April 2, 1997

Mr. Cecil Parker  
#5 Carl Circle  
Vidalia, LA 71373

Dear Cecil,

Just a reminder and final request that you attend the focus group interview session at 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 8, 1997 in the meeting room of the Macon Ridge Research Station located at Winnsboro, Louisiana.

I realize that this is a busy time of the year but this is the very earliest date that I could get the study started and the session will last no longer than 2 hours. You were selected because you are a leader in the Louisiana cotton industry, please try to attend. The study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs and problems areas in Extension programming related to the Louisiana cotton industry. The results of this study will also be used to complete my dissertation for my doctoral degree at LSU.

I really do need your help, please try to make it if at all possible.

John W. Barnett  
County Agent

JWB/dr

Enclosure

C: Howard Gryder



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Fax: (318) 387-9376

April 2, 1997

Mr. Buddy Page  
P. O. Box 1738  
Columbia, LA 71418-1738


Dear Buddy,

Just a reminder and final request that you attend the focus group interview session at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, April 8, 1997 in the Northeast University Agricultural Mechanization Facility located on Highway 80 East, on the NLU Farm.

I realize that this is a busy time of the year but this is the very earliest date that I could get the study started and the session will last no longer than 2 hours. You were selected because you are a leader in the Louisiana cotton industry, please try to attend. The study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs and problems areas in Extension programming related to the Louisiana cotton industry. The results of this study will also be used to complete my dissertation for my doctoral degree at LSU.

I really do need your help, please try to make it if at all possible.

Thanks

  
John W. Barnett  
County Agent

JWB/dr

Enclosure

C: Howard Gryder



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704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

April 2, 1997

Dr. Grady Coburn  
P. O. Box 302  
Cheneyville, LA 71325


Dear Grady,

Just a reminder and final request that you attend the focus group interview session at 1:30 p.m. on Monday, April 7, 1997 in the main office meeting room of the Dean Lee Research Station at LSU-A.

I realize that this is a busy time of the year but this is the very earliest date that I could get the study started and the session will last no longer than 2 hours. You were selected because you are a leader in the Louisiana cotton industry, please try to attend. Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs and problems areas in Extension programming related to the Louisiana cotton industry. The results of this study will also be used to complete my dissertation for my doctoral degree at LSU.

I really do need your help, please try to make it if at all possible.

Thanks

  
John W. Barnett  
County Agent

JWB/dr

Enclosure

C: Howard Gryder



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West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

**E-Mail Correspondence**

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

April 7, 1997

TO: Bill Russell, Franklin Parish

RE: Study of Effectiveness of LCES Cotton Advisory Committees

Dear Bill:

In Director Bagent's March 12, 1997 e-mail memorandum to you he indicated that Extension would be conducting a study of the effectiveness of LCES cotton advisory committees. As a part of this study a focus group session was conducted in Winnsboro on April 8, 1997. No one from your parish attended or indicated that they had planned to.

Due to the fact that Franklin Parish is the largest cotton producing parish in the state and needs to be represented in this study, I have set another focus group session for May 13, 1997 to be conducted at the Chase Research Station. Franklin Parish will not be the only parish represented. This will be the final focus group session for producers and will include those who had planned to attend one of the three previous sessions but could not.

In order to proceed with the study I will need the name, address and phone number of one (1) cotton producer who has experience with cotton advisory committees and Extension programming in your parish. Please try to select a producer who represents all aspects and viewpoints of the cotton industry and Extension programming.

Please submit the name to me by April 18, 1997. Thank you in advance for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

John W. Barnett  
County Agent  
Ouachita Parish

c: Dr. Satish Verma  
Mr. Howard Gryder



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(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

April 11, 1997

Dr. Wink Alison  
Macon Ridge Research Station  
212 Macon Ridge Road  
Winnsboro, LA 71295

Dear Wink,

I really appreciated the use of the meeting room at the Macon Ridge Research Station on Tuesday, April 8, 1997.

Results of the study should yield useful information that can help determine educational needs and problem areas in Extension programming related to the cotton industry in Louisiana.

Thanks for the assistance.

Sincerely,

John W. Barnett  
County Agent

JWB/dr

c: Dr. Bob Hutchinson  
Mr. Howard Gryder



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704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

April 11, 1997

Mr. Glynn Tubbs  
NLU Foundation  
NLU Station  
Monroe, LA 71209-3200

**Re: Use of NLU Ag Mech Facility**

Dear Glynn,

Thanks for the use of the agricultural mechanization building on Tuesday, April 8, 1997. Also, please express my appreciation to Ronnie for his assistance.

Be sure and call on me whenever I can be of assistance to you and the NLU farm.

Sincerely,

John W. Barnett  
County Agent

JWB/dr

c: Howard Gryder



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(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

April 11, 1997

Dr. Jack Kreider  
Resident Director  
Dean Lee Research Station  
8105 East Campus Drive  
Alexandria, LA 71302

Re: Use of Meeting Room

Dear Dr. Kreider,

Thank you for allowing me to use your facility for the recent meeting with cotton producers in your area of the state. As per our conversation of April 7, 1997 I am requesting the use of the meeting room at the Dean Lee Research Station on **Monday, May 12, 1997**. I will need use of the room from 12:00 Noon till 4:30 p.m.

I will be using the room to conduct a discussion meeting with parish Extension agents. This meeting is one of a series that I am conducting around the state as part of a study of the Louisiana cotton industry. The study is an approved LSU Agricultural Center doctoral research project. Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs related to the cotton industry in Louisiana.

Thank you in advance for the use of the facility. Be sure and call on me whenever I can be of assistance to you and the Dean Lee Research Station.

Sincerely,

John W. Barnett  
County Agent

JWB/dr

cc: Howard Gryder



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April 11, 1997

Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

Dr. Bill Davis  
Assistant District Agent, District 4  
P. O. Box 497  
Crowley, LA 70527-0497

Dear Bill,

As a part of the study of Extension cotton advisory committees and programming, I am requesting that you allow the following agents to participate in a focus group session at the designated date and location:

Dean Lee Research Station  
Monday, May 12, 1997  
1:30 p.m.

Dr. Carlos Smith  
John Harris  
Keith Normand

As you are aware this study has been approved by Director Jack Bagent and he has indicated that special travel funds will be available for agent travel to the focus group sessions. He has directed me to contact Dr. Bivin with a request for the special travel approval. I plan to do this in the next few days.

I am looking forward to receiving your approval for these agents to participate. Thanks for the assistance.

Sincerely,

John W. Barnett  
County Agent  
Ouachita Parish

c: Dr. Jack Bagent  
Dr. Rosalie Bivin  
Dr. Earl Johnson  
Dr. Satish Verma



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704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

April 16, 1997

Mr. Paul Ransom  
P. O. Box 4337  
Monroe, LA 71203-7343

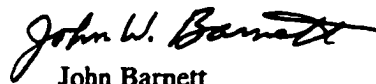
Dear Paul,

I really appreciated you taking the time from your busy schedule to attend the recent focus group interview. The session was excellent and provide a good evaluation of Extension advisory committees and programming.

When finished this study should yield useful information that can determine educational needs and problem areas in Extension programming related to the cotton industry of Louisiana. I look forward to sharing the completed report with you.

Thanks again for the assistance. Be sure and call on me and the LSU Ag Center Extension Service whenever we can be of assistance to you or the Louisiana cotton industry.

Sincerely

  
John Barnett  
County Agent

C: Dr. Satish Verma  
Dr. Earl Johnson  
Dr. Gene Baker





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April 16, 1997

Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

Mr. Travis Walker  
459 Longview Road  
Winnsboro, LA 71295

Dear Mr. Walker,

The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service (LCES) is very concerned about delivering quality programs and information to the cotton producers of Louisiana. I was very sorry that you could not attend the recent focus group interview session that was conducted to evaluate the LCES cotton advisory committee system and programming.


In an attempt to include all selected parishes and producer participants in the study, I plan to conduct one final focus group interview. This final session will be at 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 13, 1997, in the meeting room of the Sweet Potato Research Station at Chase, Louisiana.

At this meeting a moderator will be asking a limited number of questions to the group. These questions are designed to lead to a comfortable, constructive and informative session. The session will be observed by trained observers and will be recorded so that it can be studied for content at a later time. Focus group interviews have been proven as one of the best approaches to evaluate and improve educational programs.

You were selected because you are a leader in the Louisiana cotton industry, please try to attend. Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs of the Louisiana cotton industry that can be addressed by the LCES.

I am enclosing a confirmation card of your attendance. Please return it to me as soon as possible. Looking forward to seeing you on May 13, 1997.

Sincerely,

  
John Barnett  
County Agent

JWB/dr

Enclosure

C: Mr. Howard Gryder  
Dr. Satish Verma  
Dr. Gene Baker

Dr. Earl Johnson  
Dr. Jack Bagent  
Dr. Mike Cannon



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April 22, 1997

Ouachita Parish Office  
704 Cypress Street  
West Monroe, LA 71291-2922

(318) 323-2251  
Fax: (318) 387-9376

Mr. Terry Erwin  
County Agent  
P. O. Box 192  
Bastrop, LA 71221-0192

Dear Terry,

In Director Bagent's March 12, 1997 e-mail memorandum to you he indicated that Extension would be conducting a study of the effectiveness of LCES cotton advisory committees. To complete the study I will need your help.

At 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, May 13, 1997, in the meeting room of the Sweet Potato Research Station at Chase, Louisiana, a focus group interview will be conducted. At this meeting a moderator will be asking a limited number of questions to the group. These questions are designed to lead to a comfortable, constructive and informative session. I am asking you to be a part of this focus group interview.

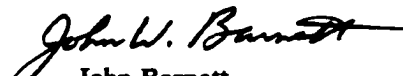
The session will be observed by trained observers and will be recorded so that it can be studied for content at a later time. Focus group interviews have been proven as one of the best approaches to evaluate and improve educational programs.

You were selected because you are an Extension agent with experience in cotton advisory committees and programming related to the cotton industry in Louisiana. Results of the study may yield useful information that could help determine educational needs of the Louisiana cotton industry that can be addressed by the LCES.

As you are aware this study has been approved by Director Jack Bagent and he has indicated that special travel funds will be available for agent travel to the focus group session. You should receive a letter from Dr. Bivin in the next few days approving this as special travel.

Looking forward to seeing you on May 13, 1997.

Sincerely,

  
John Barnett  
County Agent

C: Mr. Howard Gryder  
Dr. Satish Verma  
Dr. Earl Johnson

Dr. Jack Bagent  
Dr. Mike Cannon  
Dr. Rosalie Bivin



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## **APPENDIX C**

### **Questions for Focus Group Interviews**

### Questions for Focus Group Interviews

#### Questions - Agents - Focus Group Interviews

1. Reflect on and express the things that stick out in your mind about advisory committees and the programming process related to the cotton industry.
  - (b) Describe the membership of your cotton advisory committee.
  - (c) Describe the process that you use to select members.
  - (d) Describe how your parish cotton advisory committee functions (number of members, meetings times, activities, etc.).
2. Name the major problem areas and needs of the cotton industry that can be addressed by the LCES.
  - (b) Has your parish cotton advisory committee worked on these needs?
  - (c) What has been accomplished or why have the needs not been worked on?
3. As a result of their participation in the work of the advisory committee to what extend do you feel that committee members gained knowledge of other extension programs.
4. An important function of an advisory committee is to spread information. To what extend does your parish advisory committee work to inform clientele of extension cotton education programs. Give examples.
5. Based on the factors, needs and problem areas that have been identified during our discussion share your thoughts on improving the advisory committee system and Extension programming.
6. What are your final thoughts on the cotton advisory system and the programming process after these discussions?

**Questions - Members - Focus Group Interviews**

1. Please introduce yourself and share your experience with the LSU Agricultural Center Extension Service relating to the cotton industry in your parish.
  - (b) What has been your experience with Extension cotton advisory committees?
  - (C) Describe how your parish cotton advisory committee functions (number of members, meeting times, activities, etc.).
2. Discuss some major problem areas and needs of the cotton industry that can be addressed by the LCES.
  - (b) Has your parish advisory committee worked on these needs and problems?
  - (c) What has been accomplished?
3. As a result of your participation in the work of the advisory committee are there other Extension programs that you now know more about?
  - (b) Are you or members of your family involved in other Extension programs such as 4-H or home economics?
4. An important function of an advisory committee is to spread information. To what extent do you as a parish agricultural leader work to inform others of extension cotton education programs. Give examples.
5. Based on the factors, needs, and problems that have been identified during our discussion would you share your thoughts on improving the advisory committee system and Extension programming.
6. What are your final thoughts on the current Extension cotton advisory system and programming process?

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Content Index by Categories for Cotton Producers and Extension Agents**

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Initial Feelings and Attitudes</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Good working relationship with Extension	General agreement
Positive experiences with Extension staff	General agreement
Had used Extension information for many years	General agreement
Saw Extension as provider of educational information and programs	General agreement
Recognized Extension's leadership role	General agreement
Recognized Extension as a catalyst to get things done	General agreement
Role of Extension to organize and coordinate	General agreement Group 2
Keeps producers in business	General agreement Group 3
Helps producers make correct management decisions	General agreement Group 3

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Experience With Cotton Advisory Committees</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Formal and informal meetings	General agreement
Producer involvement weak	General agreement Group 1
Poor understanding of function	General agreement Group 1
No specific parish activities	General agreement Group 1
Positive experience	General agreement Group 2
Good understanding of function	General agreement Group 2
Good for cotton industry	General agreement Group 2 & 3
Tool for Extension to use	General agreement Group 2
Mixed understanding of relationship to Extension programming	General agreement Group 2



<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Experience With Cotton Advisory Committees</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Long term member of parish cotton advisory committee	14
Specific advisory committee activities	8
Need young producer involvement	5
Perceives short comings in the parish advisory committee	1
Only remembered one meeting in last two years	1
Wished the committee would meet at night	1
Committee needs a more defined purpose	1
Desire for an agenda to be mailed out before the meetings	1
Have to make people get involved	1
Extension has a challenge	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Experience with Extension Programming</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Positive	General agreement Groups 2 & 3

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Experience with Extension Programming</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Unbiased with exception of boll weevil eradication program	General agreement Groups 2 & 3
Must have producers involved for successful programs	14
Poor understanding of how advisory committees related to program planning	13
Extension needs to provide intensive information to the producers	4
Extension is weak in cotton programs in the parish	3
Local staff can call on Ag Center system for assistance	1
County agent is more knowledgeable in other crops	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Role of Extension</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Educational	General agreement
Leadership	General agreement

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Role of Extension</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Catalyst	General agreement
More expertise needed	General agreement Group 1
To organize	General agreement Group 2
To coordinate	General agreement Group 2
Program planning	12
To deliver unbiased information	7
Cover the business end of farming	1
Needs to be neutral	1
There is a lot more to Extension than once a year meeting	1
Crop advising is only a part	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Advisory Committee Function</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Formal meeting once each year	General agreement Groups 2 & 3
Provide advice for county agent	General agreement Groups 2 & 3
Increases communications between county agent and parish cotton producers	5
One on one meetings with members throughout the year	5
Committee needs more young producer members	3

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Advisory Committee Purpose</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Committee tells county agent what the problems are	General agreement Groups 2 & 3
Committee keeps county agent updated on parish situation	7
We try to help county agent	2
We talk about what can be done to make a profit	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Advisory Committee Purpose</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
We talk a lot about demonstration work	1
It gives the county agent direction	1
Committee can help the county agent get things done	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Problem Areas and Educational Needs of the Cotton Industry</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Information transfer	General agreement
Speed of delivery of Extension information	General agreement Groups 1 & 3
Education of general public about importance of agriculture	General agreement Groups 1 & 2
More producer involvement in Extension programs	General agreement Groups 2 & 3
Environmental stewardship	General agreement Groups 2 & 3

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Problem Areas and Educational Needs of the Cotton Industry</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Marketing and farm management	General agreement Groups 2 & 3
Pesticide record keeping	General agreement Group 2
Bio-technology information	General agreement Group 2
Better integrated pest management	General agreement Group 3
Biased information from consultants and agri-business representatives	7
Not enough positive exposure in the media	4
Proper irrigation	2
Ultra narrow row cotton production	2
Cotton verification program	2
Poly pipe disposal	1
Standardization of rules and regulations for pesticide safety and worker protection	1
Pesticide pick up program every five years	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Problem Areas and Educational Needs of the Cotton Industry</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Pesticide container disposal	1
Control of cotton seed supply by one company	1
Technology conservation	1
Crop rotation	1
Education of landlords about cost of production	1
Boll weevil eradication	1
Disposal of tires	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Advisory Committee Work and Accomplishments</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Problem identification	General agreement
Provide input for educational programs	General agreement Groups 2 & 3
Assist county agent with conducting of educational programs	General agreement Groups 2 & 3

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Advisory Committee Work and Accomplishments</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Initiated programs	3
Advisory committee should act as a steering committee to get things going	3
Problems have been worked on and much has been accomplished	2
Essential that advisory committee be pro active	1
Pesticide pick up program	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Involvement in Other Extension Programs</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Support for all Extension programs	General agreement
Primarily involved in agricultural program area	General agreement Groups 1 & 2
Limited involvement of family members in other Extension programs	General agreement Groups 1 & 2



<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Involvement in Other Extension Programs</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
4-H and Home Economics programs could be used to aid agriculture in public education outreach	General agreement Groups 1 & 3
Substantial involvement in other program areas by family members	General agreement Group 3
Very supportive of all Extension programs	General agreement Group 3
Involved with 4-H program	4
Spouse involved with Home Economics program	3
Have worked with environmental and energy conservation programs	2
Involved in soybean verification program	2
Start an "Ag in the Classroom" program with 4-H	1
Need the non-farm programs to justify Extension	1
Very important that Extension reach a broad spectrum of the population	1
Extension needs to be the group to link agriculture to the public	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Environmental Concerns</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Need public education that farmers are not trying to poison the environment	2
People in town know very little about farming	1
People ask why don't we farm the way we used to	1
The more information you put out, the more problems you may cause	1
Wish Extension would contact the chemical companies about the negative advertising, that show pesticides killing everything	1
The names of pesticide products create a negative image	1
News stories usually show us in a bad light	1
Should be a state law that farmers cannot fill pesticide spray tanks from a public water system	1
The guy in his yard causes more pesticide problems, but agriculture gets the bad press	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Timeliness of Extension Information</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
The Internet has good potential for future use	General agreement
Extension has to develop a system to deliver research information as quickly as possible	General agreement Groups 1 & 3
Extension publications late in coming out	General agreement Groups 1 & 3
Extension hampered by not being able to recommend until they have 3 years of research information	General agreement Groups 2 & 3
The Louisiana Cotton Forum is one of the best places to get information early in the year	General agreement Group 2
Extension should prepare a spiral bound notebook that can be updated instead of individual bulletins	General agreement Group 3
Old news by the time Extension starts to recommend new varieties and pesticides	General agreement Group 1
Publish research station findings every year, whether they are recommended or not	2
Some justification for cautious recommendations	1
By the time you get Extension information, I have finished what I am going to do	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Value of Extension Programs</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Educational meetings very valuable	8
Sometimes slow to respond to the needs of the producer	1
People who do not participate in Extension programs are the ones that complain the most	1
County agent hears what we say and responds	1
Important because they tell both sides of the story	1
The chemical pick up program was good	1
Programs for aerial applicators very good	1
The information I get at the Cotton Forum is very useful and timely	1
I use anything Extension has	1
Horticulture program is very important to the urban people	1
Extension programs keep us in business	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Effectiveness of Cotton Advisory Committees</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Need a written agenda	General agreement
Should include all crops, not just cotton	General agreement
New involvement of new and young producers	General agreement Groups 2 & 3
Very valuable	General agreement Groups 2 & 3
Limited value in addressing producers needs	General agreement Group 1
Might be used to promote use of Internet	General agreement Group 1
Could be used to urge Extension administration to speed information delivery	General agreement Group 1
Advisory committee system needed	General agreement Group 3
Could be used to gather information about the feeling of producers at the grass roots level	1
Many times the county agent knows the problems before the committee meeting	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Effectiveness of Cotton Advisory Committees</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Committee does not need to tell the county agent what to do	1
If I need to know something today, I do not have time for a meeting of the advisory committee	1
Have no problem with the advisory committee	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Improving Extension Programs</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Producer involvement	General agreement
Extension too slow to respond, improve speed of delivery	General agreement Groups 1 & 2
Concentrate on marketing and farm management	General agreement Group 2
Develop closer working relationship and better communications with research	General agreement Group 3
Deliver only unbiased educational programs	General agreement Group 3

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Improving Extension Programs</b>	
Speed information delivery by using research generated in the private sector	8
Mail out a list of advisory committee members to parish producers	4
Continue Ag Leadership program	2
There is a whole system of consultants, companies, researchers, dealers, and farmers and the county agent needs to be part of the system	1
The consultant has filled a need that the county agent used to meet	1
Improve communication skills of agents	1
Can the system keep up with technology transfer	1
You need a new advisory committee structure	1
Do not need a cotton advisory committee in every parish	1
Extension needs to regain credibility	1
If a county agent has a date planner and has a lot of appointments, then he is probably not seeing a lot of farmers out in the field	1
My best county agent is my consultant	1
I look at the county agent as part public relations for Extension	1
Need better salaries to attract qualified people	1
Advisory committees must meet on a regular schedule	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR MEMBERS</b> <b>Improving Extension Programs</b>	
Extension needs to change with the times	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Initial Feelings and Attitudes</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Viewed the advisory committee as a source of advice and problem identification	General agreement
Most of the farmers on the cotton advisory committee are involved in other commodities	General agreement
Viewed advisory committee as a necessary part of Extension program planning	General agreement Group 2
Viewed advisory committee as a requirement of administration	6
I have a problem with committees that have people who come and do not say anything	1
Not sure what is the best program	1
More secure in the information base three years ago	1
Most members are good people	1
It is hard to have just a cotton advisory committee	1
Need to explain the structure of the Ag Center to members and where Extension fits	1



<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Selection of Advisory Committee Members</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Included black and white, small and large producers	General agreement
Majority of members producers	General agreement
Select persons who will attend and participate	General agreement
Representation from all areas of parish	General agreement
Tried to add young farmers when possible	General agreement
Included members from agri-business and other agricultural agencies	17
Included consultants	4
Good minority participation	1
Contact new members as they are suggested by the committee	1
Will keep interested members serving	1
Young farmers have more knowledge of worldwide agriculture	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Parish Cotton Advisory Committee Function</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Rotation of members	General agreement
Formal and informal meetings	General agreement
One on one contact with members throughout the year	General agreement
Formal meeting of committee every year	General agreement Group 2
Assist county agent throughout the year with programs and activities	15
Meet once every four years as called for in the Extension programming cycle	2
Farm tours are not possible without support from advisory committee members	1
The committee is a work in progress	1
Group function is not as valuable as one on one	1
The advisory is a sounding board	1
Need formal meeting to prioritize what needs to be done	1
The function is different in every parish	1
They cannot grasp our limitations and what we can do	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Parish Cotton Advisory Committee Function</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Committee members do not always function well in leadership positions	1
Do not make it something that it is not	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Parish Cotton Advisory Committee Purpose</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Source of advice	General agreement
Developing programs	General agreement Group 1
Problem identification	General agreement Group 2
Legitimized programs	General agreement Group 1
Strengthened programs	General agreement Group 2

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Parish Cotton Advisory Committee Purpose</b>	
Committee assists with and/or initiates activities	General agreement Group 1
Very helpful in determining program direction	General agreement Group 2
Provide information on crop situation	General agreement Group 2
Programming input	5
Each agent has to develop their own program	3
Give direction for programming direction that you may not see	3
They can help get out educational material	2
They will come across with good ideas	1
Need to pull educational objectives out of committee	1
The advisory committee is not going to set programs, the agent has to	1
They are an advisory committee, not a policy setting committee or rule making committee	1
Do not use the advisory committee to spread the word, that is not what they are for	1
You need the advisory committee only for guidance	1
It is not for leadership development	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Problems and Educational Needs of the Cotton Industry</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Marketing	General agreement Groups 1 & 2
Pest management	General agreement Groups 1 & 2
Area specialists	General agreement Group 1
Speed of information delivery	General agreement Group 1
Better working relationship between Extension, research, agri-business and consultants	6
Boll Weevil eradication	5
The consultant/extension dilemma	4
Handbook for cotton production	2
Drainage	2
Farm management	2
Bio-technology and the need for Extension to stay at the forefront	2
Irrigation research and information	2

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Problems and Educational Needs of the Cotton Industry</b>	
Flooding	1
Improved varieties	1
An Extension weed specialist at the Winnsboro location	1
Increased postage for Extension mail outs	1
Timeliness of Extension publications	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Advisory Committee Work and Accomplishments</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Problems and needs discussed	General agreement
Individual members had assisted with demonstrations and educational programs	General agreement
No specific accomplishments given as a result of work of the committee	General agreement
Saw the advisory committee's main function as problem identification and advising on program direction	General agreement
The development of programs was primarily the agent's responsibility	General agreement

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Advisory Committee Work and Accomplishments</b>	
Extension administration could help with some problem areas	General agreement Group 1
Committee members actively involved in program implementation	5
Need respected members of community for demonstration work	3
Committee is just going to identify problems	2
The committee cannot accomplish anything	1
An advisory committee, in theory, would be very good in promoting educational programs, but in reality this does not happen.	1
Agri-business members help promote programs	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Committee Members Involvement With Other Extension Programs</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Awareness	General agreement
Limited involvement	General agreement

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Committee Members Involvement With Other Extension Programs</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Membership fostered understanding of other program areas and agent responsibilities	General agreement
All crops committee gave producers a better appreciation of other programs	General agreement
Advisory committee discussions carried over into all program areas	General agreement Group 2
Most members have family involved in other Extension programs	1
It is all tied together	1
Overall advisory council can help	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Relationships with Consultants and Agri-Business</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Used consultants, researchers, and specialists as part of advisory committee	8
Programming specialists might be of value to observe and evaluate advisory committee meetings	8
Consultants and agri-business personnel are competition	8



<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Relationships with Consultants and Agri-Business</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Must work with consultants and agri-business personnel	8
Considered consultants and agri-business personnel to be a part of clientele base	7
Extension needs to work with all clientele	6
Have demonstration work with specialists, researchers, and consultants	2
Companies and consultants are working together	1
Consultants only recommend what they are being paid to recommend	1
If we need researchers or specialists, we call them, they are not part of advisory system	1
No problem with consultants	1
A lot of difference in individual consultants	1
Consultants are providing a service to the producers, they should have the best information Extension can provide	1
At one time Extension was the major source of information	1
Putting information on the Internet would only give consultants an advantage	1
Extension is serving its purpose as long as the producer is getting the information	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Improving Parish Advisory Committees</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Change structure to include all crops	General agreement
Written agenda	General agreement Group 1
Educate members on purpose of advisory committees	General agreement Group 2
Include state specialists and researchers	5
Educate members on the relationship between Extension and other federal and state agencies	2
Abolish cotton advisory committees	2
Outside observer to evaluate	1
Good working relationships with members	1
Small group community advisory meetings	1
Go into the meeting with ideas and suggestions, cutting edge things	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Improving Extension Programming</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Address real and immediate needs	General agreement
Timely information	General agreement
Additional agent training	General agreement Group 1
Specialized agent assignments	General agreement Group 1
Area specialists	General agreement Group 1
Develop a transition program for young agents into agricultural work assignments	General agreement Group 1
Use of Internet and mass media	General agreement Group 2
Maintain Extension's role as educators	General agreement Group 2
Develop closer working relationship with research	7
Develop closer working relationship with consultants and agri-business	2

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Improving Extension Programming</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Improve advisory committees	2
Base all educational programs and information on research	1
Develop a strong communication network with research counterparts	1
Intensify agent training	1

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Effectiveness of Cotton Advisory Committees</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Legitimized programs	General agreement
Valuable for problem identification and advising	General agreement
Negative feelings overall	General agreement Group 1
Very important part of Extension programming	General agreement Group 2
Very little value in developing parish programs	7

<b>CONTENT INDEX BY CATEGORIES FOR AGENTS</b> <b>Effectiveness of Cotton Advisory Committees</b>	
<b>MESSAGES</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>
Does not assist Extension in meeting the needs of the cotton industry	6
Backbone of programming	1

## VITA

The author was born July 6, 1952, in Arcadia, Louisiana. He obtained his high school education from Choudrant High School, in Choudrant, Louisiana. He completed his Bachelor of Science degree in Vocational Agriculture at Louisiana Tech University in August, 1974, and his Master of Science degree in Life Sciences from Louisiana Tech University in August, 1977.

Upon completion of his Bachelor of Science degree, the author was employed by the Union Parish School Board as a vocational agriculture teacher. The author was employed there until 1979 when he was employed by the University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service as a county agricultural agent.

The author returned to Louisiana in 1980 and began work as a associate county agent with the Louisiana Sate University Agricultural Center's Extension Service in Caldwell Parish. In 1984 he was promoted to county agent and parish chairman for Caldwell parish. In 1989 he transferred to Ouachita parish in the position of county agent.

In 1995 the author transferred to Baton Rouge and worked out of the Extension Service state office in the program area of cotton tillage. While in Baton Rouge he pursued additional graduate study. In 1996 he transferred back to Ouachita parish as county agent and still holds that position.

# DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

**Candidate:** John W. Barnett

**Major Field:** Vocational Education

**Title of Dissertation:** A Qualitative Evaluation of the Effectiveness of  
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service Cotton  
Advisory Committees Using Focus Group Interviews

**Approved:**

*Fatima Venna*  
Major Professor and Chairman  
*John W. Larkin*  
Dean of the Graduate School

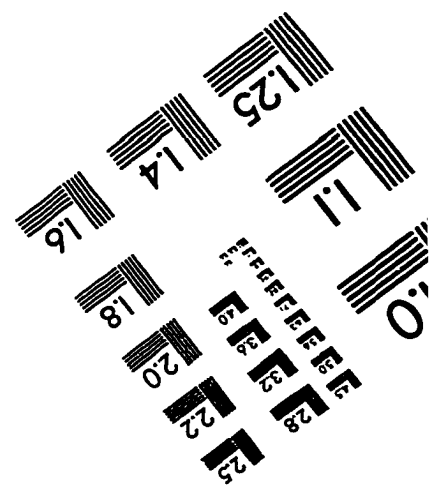
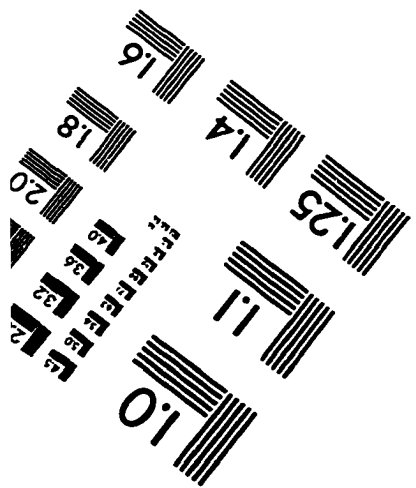
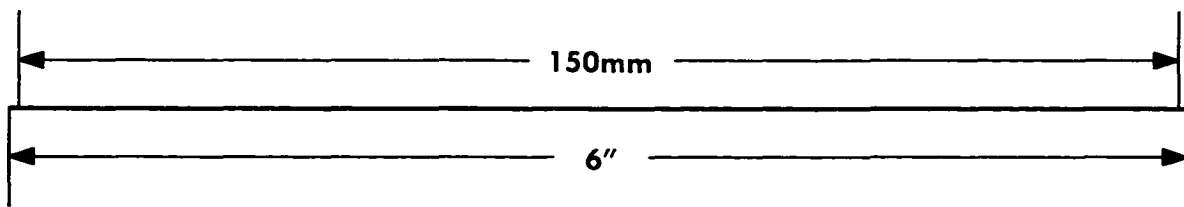
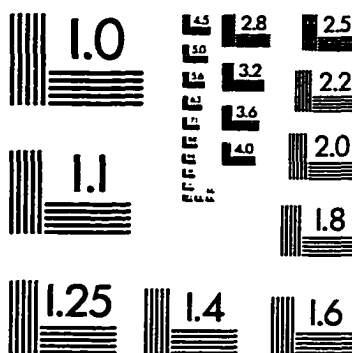
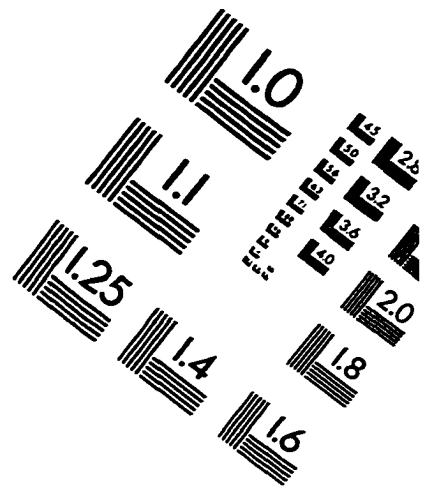
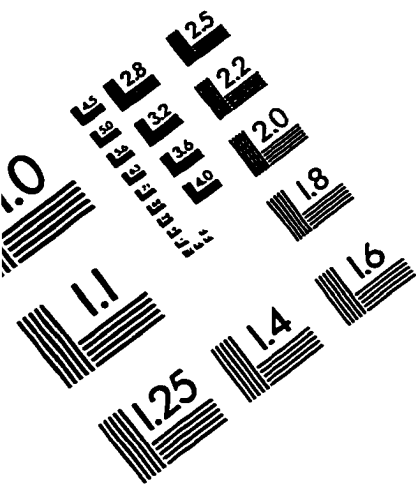
**EXAMINING COMMITTEE:**

*Michael L. Barnett*  
*Carl P. Leeper*  
*Earl C. Johnson*  
*Darryl M. Lee*

**Date of Examination:**

September 3, 1997

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